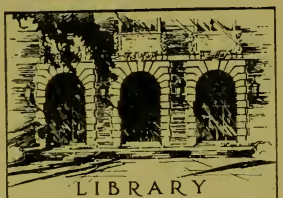
NEVERMORE

ROLF BOLDREWOOD



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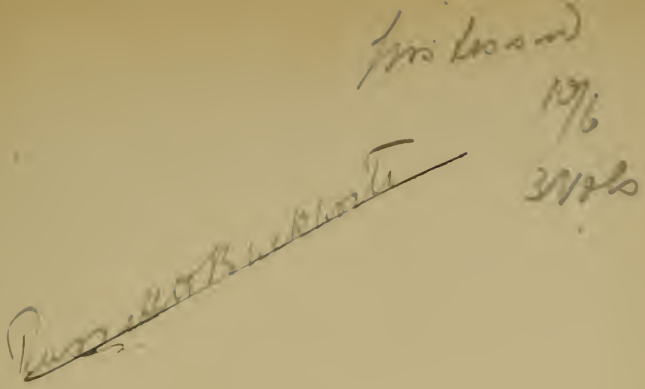

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BY

ROLF BOLDREWOOD

AUTHOR OF 'ROBBERY UNDER ARMS,' 'THE SQUATTER'S DREAM,' 'THE MINER'S RIGHT,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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CHAPTER XII

Bail having been refused, presumably at the instance of the police—who, in cases where there is probability of the prisoner levanting or of arrangements being made to defeat the ends of justice, are entitled to object—there remained no course but that Lance Trevanion should be re-committed to gaol. Ned Lawless was also detained for safe keeping, the same reasons operating even with greater force in his case. This was the third time that Lance had been brought forth to stand before a gaping crowd—the third time that he had been transferred to the grim precincts of a prison and heard the massive iron gates clang behind him.

'I begin to feel,' he said bitterly to Stirling, 'almost like an habitual criminal. If there is a God that judgeth the earth, as they used to tell us in old days, why am I permitted to be thus degraded, falsely accused, and unjustly imprisoned?'

It was in this period of trial and sore need that Lance discovered the nature of friendship. Genial acquaintances and friendly-seeming personages he had encountered by the hundred. These were now for the most part too busy or indifferent to visit him in his affliction. Charles Stirling, however, in spite of his onerous and responsible duties, lost no opportunity of aid or service. Sometimes he rode half the night in order to get back to his work in proper time after visiting the captive and comforting him as best he could. He petitioned the Governor-in-Council, drafting and procuring signatures to a memorial setting forth Lance's hard case and praying that he might be released on bail. He addressed members of the Bench, and essayed to

persuade them to act independently, offering to find bail to any amount and lodge the money. Hastings and Jack Polwarth canvassed their fellow-miners. The newspaper press was invoked. But all in vain. The time was inopportune. So many horses had been stolen that a strong popular prejudice had arisen; justice demanded a victim. A reactionary sentiment commenced to prevail. It was openly stated that because Trevanion, of Number Six, was a 'swell' and had dropped into a lucky claim, that was no reason why he should be let off more than a poor man.

Wild and unsettled were the times too—those years early in 'the fifties.' Martial law was thought necessary for the holding in check of an army of untamed spirits. A close discriminating adherence to legal form could hardly be attained. The upshot of it all was that, to the disgust and despair of Hastings and Jack Polwarth, who had hoped against hope, all their efforts were vain, and Lance

was compelled to resign himself as best he might to his enforced and protracted *duresse.*

Before leaving for Melbourne Mr. England had indeed almost guaranteed that he only needed to be placed on his trial to be acquitted, asserting that no jury in the colony could possibly find him guilty upon the evidence brought before the Bench; that a committal was very different from a conviction; that some magistrates made a point of committing for trial all prisoners brought before them so as to escape responsibility; that Mr. M'Alpine had a habit of acting in that way; that he (John George England) would take the shortest odds that the jury acquitted Lance without leaving the box.

How the weeks dragged on! Autumn was fast changing into winter when the Quarter Sessions were held. Lance had expected to have been in Melbourne about the time. Only to think of it! And had he not paltered with his duty and his solemn promise might he not have been in England now, seeing the yearly

miracle of the spring transformation in that favoured clime and hearing the surges beat against the frowning headlands of Tintagel? Madness was in his thoughts. Why did he not dash his brains out against his prison walls and so end the hideous burlesque upon truth and justice, honour and common honesty even? Why had he not courage to do so? No—it would become his father's son to die in ways and fashions many and varied; but within gaol walls! No! a thousand times, no! That would be a doom impossible for a Trevanion of Wychwood.

From time to time he had gleams of hope—this miserable captive so unused to fetter and thrall. It *could* not be. It should not be. The eternal justice of heaven would be falsified were this wrong to befall him. The words of prayer that he had lisped in childhood—the Bible lessons to so many of which he had hearkened in the old Norman Church at Wychwood—what would all these be but hollow cheats and ghastly mockeries were he

to be found guilty? It was a simple impossibility. He had now but to wait—to eat out his heart for one other week, and then—oh! joy unspeakable! he would be free—free! A free man — not a prisoner! Did he ever imagine that he would attach such a meaning to the word freedom? It mattered not. Let him but once set foot outside this dismal gaol wall. Again he saw himself on the back of a good horse, or at the claim with good old Jack Polwarth and his wife and Tottie—poor dear Tottie! But here he could no longer follow out the chain of probabilities. His eyes filled with tears, and the once-proud Lance Trevanion, lowered in spirit and strength by confinement and meagre diet, threw himself upon his miserable pallet and sobbed like a child.

. . . . .

The 'next ensuing Court of Quarter Sessions,' to which Lance Trevanion had been committed for trial, was formally opened at Ballarat on a certain Wednesday at ten of

the clock. The sheriff was in attendance, with bailiff and minor officials, and also various barristers, including Mr. England. An unusual number of police appeared on the scene, including the superintendent of the district—a very high personage indeed. All were in full uniform, while conspicuous among them stood Sergeant Dayrell, calm and impassive as usual, though a close observer might have noticed an occasional sign of impatience.

When the doors of the court-house were opened a rush took place which filled the building so completely that many were excluded and compelled to remain outside, trusting to occasional reports of the exciting matters within. The judge in his robes, attended by the sheriff, took his seat upon the bench punctually at the appointed time. And once more Lance Trevanion and his fellow-prisoner Ned Lawless were brought forth to serve as a spectacle to a wondering or sympathetic crowd, as the case might be.

The Crown prosecutor, in opening the case, alluded to 'the prevalence of a system of horse-stealing, now become so notorious; if unchecked it might lead to the gravest results. The jury would have an opportunity of hearing the evidence in detail, from which they would of course form their judgment. But they must not lose sight of the fact that the prisoners had been caught "red-handed," if he might use the expression. They were actually in possession of a large number of stolen horses, many of which were of great value. Some had since been identified by their owners, who were chiefly miners and working-men connected with the diggings. He had no desire, he might assure them, to prejudice their minds in any way; he would merely furnish his evidence for the Crown as he was bound to do, and trust to the intelligent jury he saw before him to do their duty without fear or favour. It was a painful sight to him, as it doubtless was to them, to see two such fine specimens of early manhood arraigned

for so serious an offence. But no consideration of that sort must be suffered to influence their minds. He would not detain them longer, but would call the first witness.'

As in all trials, the same witnesses as on the preliminary examinations were heard, the difference being that no written depositions were taken, the judge only recording in his notes the evidence with care and exactness. Mr. England cross-examined the witnesses with increased rigour and more searching scrutiny. Every fact or fiction in their previous history which could tend to weaken or discredit their testimony in the eyes of the jury was fully ventilated. Every motive which could possibly colour this testimony against the prisoners was suggested or exposed.

Sergeant Dayrell's evidence was unsparingly criticised. To his calm and carefully worded statements, studiously colourless, but little exception could be taken. Still, more than one *historiette* had been elicited from the distant part of the colony where he once

was stationed which tended to establish his reputation for unscrupulousness, for desire for conviction at all risks. He was forced to acknowledge that he had been the apprehending constable in a well-known stock case near the New South Wales border, as well as to admit that his zeal on that occasion being in conflict with the law, had caused the committing magistrate to be mulcted in heavy costs and damages. These and other facts being mercilessly dragged forth somewhat detracted from the value of his evidence.

Then Catharine Lawless was once more called. Again it seemed that the spectators, as upon the appearance on the stage of a favourite actress, awoke to more than common excitement and intensity of interest. All eyes were upon her as she walked composedly up to the witness-box. Dressed quietly but in perfect taste as before, there was so much grace and freedom about the girl's every movement—such self-possession in her bearing—that she looked superior to her surroundings.

She was evidently on her guard against such a display of emotion or merely feminine weakness as had occurred at the first trial. Calmly and imperturbably she gave her evidence, and as before deposed to having seen Lance Trevanion in the companionship of her brother at Eumeralla, and also at Balooka long before the day of arrest.

If there be any force in the modern doctrines of the projection of nerve force—of the subtle relation between the mesmeric will power and the object of its current—then, as for one moment she turned towards the dock and confronted the lurid light that blazed in Lance Trevanion's haughty and contemptuous regard, she should have trembled and fallen to the earth.

But no such effect followed. She gazed back for an instant with a glance fierce and tameless as his own, then coldly averted her face as she repeated her lesson, as Mr. England vehemently characterised her statement.

'Then you still persist, Catharine Lawless,'

said that gentleman, turning with unchivalrous suddenness upon his fair antagonist, 'you persist in declaring that you saw Lance Trevanion both at Balooka and Eumeralla on the date you have stated?'

'I have sworn I did see him,' she replied, while a shade of sullenness commenced to overspread her countenance.

'If these witnesses, Mr. Stirling, Mrs. Delf, Mrs. Polwarth and her husband, besides several others, have sworn that they saw him at Growlers' at a date which makes it absolutely impossible that he could have been within a hundred miles of the localities you mention, is that true or false?'

'I don't care what they swear, I have told the truth.'

'That is what they have sworn. Now, you know Mr. Stirling, Mrs. Delf, Jack Polwarth, and the rest, don't you?'

'Well, yes, I have seen them.'

'Do you think they are people likely to swear to an untruth?'

'I can't say. What I said was the truth.'

'And what they say—false!'

'I suppose so.'

As before, she was the last witness for the Crown. When her evidence was completed, she faced Mr. England, with one indignant, half-revengeful expression on her face, then walked slowly, and with coolest composure, from the court.

When the case for the Crown had come to an end Mr. England in an impressive speech 'put it to his Honour whether it was really necessary to waste the time of the court by calling witnesses for the defence. The other prisoner—the only accused, properly so called—had already pleaded guilty. Was it not patent to his Honour, to the jury, to every one in court, that this Edward Lawless—he desired to speak of him with no undue harshness—was the real and only criminal. His client had no doubt been highly imprudent in keeping company with such

dangerous associates as the Lawlesses, male and female, had proved themselves to be, but he would ask his Honour, as a man of the world, Who amongst us, in the heedless days of youth—careless of consequences, and unsuspicious of guile—had not done likewise? Were people to be treated as criminals—branded as felons—merely for socially encountering persons afterwards guilty of felony? What a Star Chamber business would this be in a British Colony!—where, thank God, every man was under the ægis of the common law of the realm. His client, unfortunate in that degree, had merely been a spectator, a looker-on. As to the H. J. horse, he was as ignorant of all guilty knowledge as himself or his Honour; was it not the wildest flight of absurdity to imagine for one moment that a man with twenty thousand pounds to his credit in the bank would be likely to receive —knowing him to be stolen—a fifty-pound horse? The thing was absurd—so absurd that he would once more put it to his Honour

whether the farce should not be ended by at once asking the jury for their verdict, which they would, he was confident, give without leaving the box.'

The judge 'felt the force of much that had been so ably presented in favour of his client, but, with every wish to afford the prisoner facilities for his defence, he was compelled to decline the application of counsel. He would prefer to hear the witnesses for the defence before summing up and addressing the jury.'

Mr. England bit his lip, but he 'bowed, of course, to his Honour's ruling,' and proceeded to call his witnesses.

Then commenced the deeper interest of the performance. Every spectator appeared to listen with concentrated attention. Not a syllable escaped attention. Not a sound arose from the dense and closely packed crowd.

All the former witnesses were called. Each in his turn gave evidence which appeared to be so conclusively in favour of the

prisoner that every one in court thought with Mr. England that the jury would never leave the box. Mr. Stirling, Jack Polwarth, Mrs. Delf, all testified to the effect that Lance Trevanion had quitted Growlers' on that particular day, Friday, the 20th September, for Balooka. When asked whether it was possible for the prisoner, Trevanion, to have been seen at Balooka shortly before the date named, they, with one accord, declared it to be impossible. He had been seen every day by one or other for months before. As to his being a couple of hundred miles off, it was absolutely false and incredible. In addition to the witnesses heard previously, two miners named Dickson and Judd were called, who swore positively that they had seen the prisoner, Trevanion, on Friday, 20th September, near 'Growlers',' evidently commencing a journey to the eastward. He had a valise strapped before his saddle, and was going along the mountain road.

'Would it lead to Balooka?'

'Yes; that was the way to Balooka. One of them had been there, and a rough shop it was. They were quite positive as to his identity.'

'He was a noticeable chap, and the horse he rode wasn't a commoner either. Any man with eyes in his head would know the pair of 'em anywhere, let alone chaps as had worked the next claim but one to him and Jack Polwarth.'

Asked whether they were quite certain that they had met the prisoner on the day stated by them, or whether they thought it might have been the day before.

'It was that very Saturday morning, and no other. They were as sure of it as of their own lives. If men couldn't be sure of that they could not be sure of anything.'

Of course they knew Lance Trevanion well?

'Yes, very well, by sight. Not that they had often spoken to him. He was a gentleman, a big man in his own country, they heard tell. He kept himself a deal to himself,

except in regard to the Lawless family, and he would have done well to have let them alone too.'

Tessie Lawless, when called upon, moved towards the witness-box with a much less assumed step than her cousin. She also turned her head towards the dock. Those who watched her saw her face soften and change like that of a woman who suddenly beholds a suffering child. As she scanned the pallid and drawn features of Lance Trevanion, upon which anger and despair, consuming anxiety and darkling doubt had written their characters indelibly, it seemed as though she must force her way to him and weep out her heart in bitter grief that he should be in such ignoble toils.

Then she braced herself for the effort and stood before the judge. The statement which she made was almost identical with that on a former occasion. A very good impression on the jury was evidently made by her candour and earnestness.

As she answered firmly yet modestly each question put to her by Mr. England, the judge was observed to listen with close attention and the jury to be unusually interested. Mr. England, scanning their faces with practised readiness, saw in imagination their short retirement and a unanimous verdict of 'not guilty' proceeding from the lips of the foreman. Then, as he approached the critical period of the question which had been so unlucky in its effects during the preliminary examination, he felt as nearly nervous as a man of his proverbial courage and varied experience could be. He was more than half disposed to omit the question altogether; how he hated himself for having been fool enough to put it in the first instance.

'I don't think I need trouble the witness with any other questions, your Honour,' he said tentatively; but here Dayrell rose and evidently prepared himself to interpose. With lightning quickness Mr. England decided to put the question in his own

form and fashion, rather than leave it to the enemy.

'One minute, Miss Esther,' he said, as if the idea had just occurred to him. 'I think you said that you were uncertain, or could not quite recall, whether you had ever seen the accused Lance Trevanion before you left the Eumeralla to come to Ballarat?'

This he said with a smilingly suggestive air which would have given the cue to an ordinary witness less imbued with a sense of unfaltering right than Tessie Lawless. But as the girl's clear brown eyes searched his face with a troubled expression, he comprehended that there was no hope of evasion, that he had got hold of one of those impracticable witnesses who really do speak 'the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,' to the consternation of lawyers and the disaster of defendants.

'I said that I *had* seen him before, at the Eumeralla,' she said simply, 'I can't swear anything else. I *did* see him, and it was a

bad day for him—and—and for me too,' she added.

'Now think again, Miss Esther. Reflect that your answer to my question is perhaps more important than any one you ever made in your life. How can you account for Trevanion being so far from Ballarat? What business had he there, and why should he leave Growlers' Gully, to which he came from the ship, as I can prove?'

The girl looked again at the dock and those who stood therein—at Ned Lawless, who lounged good-natured as ever, and smiling to all appearance; at Lance, who stood erect, darkly frowning and with a fixed stern expression, as of one who should never smile more.

'It will break my heart,' she said, 'but I must speak the truth while I stand here. I *did* see him on the Eumeralla, before we left home for Ballarat, one day with Ned.'

'I must ask again whether there is any possibility of your being mistaken in the

identity of the accused?' persisted Mr. England. 'You have heard doubtless of men being so wonderfully alike that strangers could not in many cases discover the difference?'

'Just stand down for an instant. With his Honour's permission I will recall the witness John Polwarth.'

'You are recalled upon your former oath, Mr. Polwarth. I wish to ask you whether you ever saw an individual most strangely resembling Trevanion? If so, when and where?'

'Yes—sartain,' replied John, looking pityingly upon Lance as he stood in the cage, as Jack afterwards designated it. 'There was a chap as called hisself Trevenna—Lawrence Trevenna—as coomed oot in ship with us, and was as like the master here as he'd been his twin.'

'Was the likeness really astonishing?'

''Stonishin'! I believe you. It was the most surprisin' likeness ever I seed, and so the missus'll tell you besides.'

'Well, what became of him?'

'Nivir heerd tale or tidings of him since he left the ship. Wasn't sorry for that either. He was that bad-tempered and fond of card-playing that I couldn't bear to have him in the same mess with me and the missus.'

Mrs. Polwarth, also recalled, gave similar evidence with considerable spirit, and hoped that some of the witnesses heard to-day might have some good cause to know the individual as she meant. 'He was death on playing cards, and that fond of money that he wouldn't leave off when he lost. He was the worst-tempered man in the ship.'

'That will do, Mrs. Polwarth. You may go and sit in the court with your husband. Now, Miss Lawless, you have heard what these two most respectable witnesses have sworn to. Are you still certain and positive in your own mind that you saw Lance Trevanion *himself* on the flats of the Eumeralla, or did not rather fall in with Trevenna, who seems born for the special purpose of

complicating this most involved and unhappy case?'

A look of relief and sudden satisfaction passed over the girl's face as she answered, 'I do now feel in doubt. Oh! I will not swear positively. I never dreamed that there was any one so like Mr. Trevanion.'

'Then,' pursued Mr. England, 'having now become aware that there is an individual so strikingly like Lance Trevanion that a stranger could hardly know them apart, are you desirous to correct your former evidence, given in ignorance of the fact, by now declaring on your oath that you are unable to identify the man you saw with the prisoner, Trevanion?'

The light came back to the witness's eyes, and even a faint colour rose to her cheeks as she answered firmly, almost joyfully, 'I believe in my heart that it must have been Trevenna that I saw. I cannot swear now that I saw Mr. Trevanion.'

A faint murmur of approval arose in the

court, which was promptly suppressed as the Crown Prosecutor rose.

'I do not wish, your Honour, in any way to impugn this witness's testimony. She has every desire, I feel convinced, to speak the truth. But I wish to ask her whether of *her own knowledge* she is aware that such a person as Lawrence Trevenna exists?'

'I have just heard two people swear to it,' the girl replied hastily, as if fearful that this welcome solution of a dreadful doubt should be taken from her. 'What more do I need?'

'Just so. But you must perceive that in the event—improbable, I admit, but possible—that these witnesses were mistaken or misleading, you have no knowledge of your own to fall back upon?'

'If I could only see them both together,' pleaded poor Tessie ruefully, 'I am sure I could pick out the one I saw at Eumeralla.'

'I am afraid there is no chance of that,' said the barrister, 'unless Sergeant Dayrell can produce him.'

'Perhaps it would be convenient,' answered Dayrell, in the most coldly incredulous tones, 'if I could produce a counterpart of the prisoner, Lawless, at the same time. I do not wish to distress the last witness, but one would be quite as easy as the other.'

The girl faced round, as his clear but slightly raised voice sounded through the court, and looked full at him, with scorn and indignation in every line of her countenance.

'I thought better of you, Francis Dayrell,' she said. 'You are acting a falsehood, and you know it.'

Dayrell's lips moved slightly, but no sound came from them for a moment. He bowed with an affectation of extreme courtesy before addressing the Bench.

'Your Honour, I claim protection against such an imputation. But I make great allowance for the witness, whose relation to the prisoners excuses much.'

His Honour was understood to reprove the

witness mildly but impressively, and to express a hope that she would abstain from all aggressive remarks in future.

Tessie's evidence being concluded, the Crown Prosecutor proceeded to address the jury, pointing out what, in his opinion, were the salient points of the case as brought out in evidence.

'In the first place, they would remark that large numbers of horses had been and were at that very time being systematically stolen from the miners. There existed no doubt, in the minds of persons capable of forming an opinion on such matters, that a well-organised and widely-spread association had been formed, by means of which horses stolen in one colony were driven by unfrequented routes to another, for the purpose of sale. It was not as if an occasional animal here and there had been taken. That offence, criminal in itself, doubtless, deserved some punishment. But, considering the great value of horses at the diggings, their almost

vital importance in the ordinary course of mining industry, and the difficulty of following up and punishing marauders without ruinous loss of time and expense, he was there to tell the jury that a greater wrong, a more flagrant injustice, could not be inflicted on any mining community.

'With regard to the prisoners arrested and arraigned together, one had pleaded guilty and the other had denied all knowledge—all criminal knowledge—of the fact that the horse he was riding when arrested had been stolen. There had been evidence given that day before them which directly pointed to the prisoner Trevanion's general association with the Lawlesses, such evidence as, if believed by them, must lead to the conclusion that the mode of procuring and disposing of the large number of horses found in the elder Lawless's possession was not unknown to him.

'On the other hand, there had not been wanting evidence most favourable to the

prisoner, Trevanion; favourable in its purport, and entitled to respect on account of the character and position of the witnesses. It was their province to pronounce upon the credibility of the witnesses. He would not detain them longer. They were the judges of fact. His Honour would in his charge direct them as to the law of the case.'

Then Mr. England arose, threw back his gown as if preparing for action in another arena, and faced the jury with an air of confident valour.

'His learned friend, the Crown Prosecutor, had most properly confined himself to a bare statement of facts—if facts they could be called. In the whole of his experience of alleged criminal cases it had never been his good fortune to be connected with a defence, the conduct of which was so childishly clear, the outcome of which was so ridiculously easy of solution. Putting aside for the present the utter want of all reasonable motive for the commission of a felony—the perpetration

of a crime by a man of good fame, family, and fortune—this extraordinary purposeless deed, for which only the wildest condition of insanity could account, he would briefly run over the evidence for the defence.

'First, as to the character of the prisoner's witnesses, shame was it, and sorrow as well, that he should have to refer to this unfortunate gentleman—he would repeat the word—by such a designation. The jury would note, giving the case that attention which was its due, that every witness for the defence was a person of unblemished character. Beginning with Mr. Stirling — their tried and trusted friend—what man within a hundred miles of Ballarat would doubt his word, not to speak of his solemn oath! Then, John Polwarth and his wife—the former a hard-working legitimate miner, one of a class that the country was proud of, and whose industry was rapidly lifting it to a lofty position among the nations. His fond and faithful wife. Charles Edward Hastings, a man of birth and culture, yet, like

the majority of this population, an earnest, efficient toiler. Then their respected friend and benefactress, Mrs. Delf. He should like to see any one look into that lady's face and doubt her word. The two wages-men from the Hand-in-Hand claim, men who had no earthly interest but of upholding the truth; and last, but by no means the least in weight of testimony, Miss Esther Lawless—the witness of truth, even against her own sympathies, as any child could see.

'So much for the character of our witnesses and their reliability. Then as to the agreement of this testimony. Examined separately and without suspicion of collusion, what had been their evidence, differing only with those shades of discrepancy which before all practised tribunals absolved them from any hint of tutoring? Why, it amounted to triumphant proof beyond all question or challenge, that on Thursday, the 19th of September, Launcelot Trevanion was at the Joint-Stock Bank at Growlers' Gully, and that he could not have

started on his journey to Balooka earlier than Friday, 20th, the day he was asserted to have been seen there. He held this important position to be proved, so much so that he should not again perhaps refer to it.

'Having thus briefly, but he hoped clearly, presented to them the overwhelming weight of evidence, amounting to one of the most convincing *alibis* ever proved before a court, he should pass on to the evidence for the Crown. There was an absence of direct proof, but he hesitated not to impugn the *bona fides* of Sergeant Dayrell and Catharine Lawless. He owned to regarding it with considerable suspicion. He implored the jury, as they valued their oaths, to scrutinise this part of the case most heedfully. What the motives of these witnesses might be he was not prepared to assert, but as men of the world they would probably form their own opinion. Catharine Lawless had admittedly been on friendly, more than friendly terms with the accused, why had she so completely turned round and given

damaging evidence against him? In the history of light o' loves of this nature were found fatal enmities, and hardly less fatal friendships; was it not probable that jealousy, "cruel as the grave," was the motive power in this otherwise inconsequential action? Cool and high-couraged as this witness had shown herself, he could not avoid noticing signs of discomposure which pointed to unnatural feelings and untruthful statements. Was there then some relentless vengeance in the background, the secret of which was known only to the Lawless family and Sergeant Dayrell, to be wreaked upon this unfortunate victim of treachery? He was betrayed alike in love and in friendship, in business and in pleasure. This conspiracy, he could call it by no lighter name, was no accidental affair, but a carefully planned, cold-blooded, and deliberate crime. In all trials involving criminal action it was the habit of eminent judges to direct juries to examine carefully the probability or otherwise of the prisoner's *motive* for committing the

offence charged against him. In this case no motive could possibly be said to exist. Was it likely, as he had before inquired of them, that a man with a fortune, a large fortune to his credit in a bank, with a weekly income of most enviable magnitude, increasing rather than diminishing, should lend himself to a paltry theft, such as was alleged against him? It was as though the leading country gentleman of a county in Britain should steal a donkey off a common, if they would pardon him the vulgarity of the simile. Gentlemen might smile, but was there anything to excite mirth in the haggard features and melancholy mien of the unhappy young man whom they saw in that dock? Let them imagine one of their own relatives placed in that position by no fault of his own, and they could understand his feelings. He would not for an instant urge them to act inconsistently with their oath, but he implored them to avoid by their verdict that day the dread and terrible responsibility of convicting an innocent man.'

CHAPTER XIII

THEN the judge, with a final glance at his notes, commenced to sum up on the evidence. He stood singular among his fellow-jurists for plain and unostentatious demeanour, both on and off the bench. In the matter of outward attire he could not be accused of extravagance. A studied plainness of habit distinguished him on all occasions. Careless, moreover, as to the fit of his garments as of their colour or quality. As a lawyer he was proverbially keen, clear-headed, and deeply read; but he wasted no time upon his judgments, and never was known to 'improve the occasion' by the stern or pathetic harangues in which his fellow-judges, for the most part, enclosed their decisions—the wrapper of the

pill, so to speak. So rapid and decisive were his Honour's findings that some of them had passed into household words. When he arose from his seat, and after taking a short walk along the judicial dais, as if in mental conflict, resumed his position, the spectators knew that they would not have long to wait. '"Very honest man rides a stolen horse," would have been the gist of my charge, gentlemen of the jury,' he said; 'but this truly strange and complicated case demands the closest examination. The evidence presents exceptional features. On one side you have a young man of good character and means. His pecuniary circumstances should have removed all temptation to commit the offence charged. In a spirit of recklessness he associates with the Lawless family. About their character—with the sole exception of Esther Lawless—the less said the better. He buys from Edward Lawless a horse proved to have been stolen—many an honest man during the turmoil of the gold period has done the same. He has occasionally

gambled for large sums, which is highly imprudent, but not felony, in the eyes of the law. The evidence for the defence proves fully —if believed—that he did not leave Growlers' Gully for Balooka until the 19th of September—competent witnesses swear positively to this fact. If you believe them, the case is at an end. On the other hand, as many swear to his having been seen at Balooka long before the day referred to, and also at Eumeralla, the old home of the Lawlesses, some of these witnesses must be in error, as the prisoner manifestly could not have been in two places at once. Catharine Lawless had evidently an animus *spretae injuria formae*, he felt inclined to say, which might be freely translated into a lover's quarrel of some sort. As men of the world, the jury would largely discount her evidence. A still more remarkable feature of this truly remarkable case was that Esther Lawless—whose conscientious scruples did her honour—testified also to having seen the prisoner at Eumeralla in association with Edward

Lawless. They had heard John Polwarth's evidence, and his wife's, regarding a shipmate curiously like Trevanion. Such similarities, though rare, were not unknown. There was a possibility of mistaken identity. These points, as well as the credibility of the witnesses, were for them to consider. They were the judges of fact. But it was their especial duty to give the prisoner the benefit of all reasonable doubt — a doubt which he should certainly share with them if they brought in a verdict of *not guilty*.'

When Mr. England heard the conclusion of the judge's charge, he scarcely doubted for a moment that after a short retirement of the jury his Honour's last words would be repeated by that responsible body. He therefore sat down, and calling over Charles Stirling, imparted to him confidentially his feeling on the subject. 'His Honour plainly and unmistakably was with them, and had summed up dead in favour of Trevanion. He was one of the best judges of the Victorian

Bench, clear-headed and decisive, detesting all mere verbiage. A man, a gentleman, a sound lawyer—all these Judge Buckthorne was known to be. Pity he could not borrow a little deportment from Sir Desmond, who had enough and to spare.'

Thus they talked while the business of the court went forward. Another jury had been impanelled; another case called on; another prisoner had been put in the dock and placed on the farther side with Ned Lawless. They seemed to know each other. Lance cast upon him a brief, indifferent glance, and resigned himself to silent endurance.

With respect to the issue, Charles Stirling was by no means so confident as his legal friend, veteran as he was, boasting the scars of a hundred battles. But in his character of banker he had the opportunity of hearing the general public, as represented by the 'legitimate miner,' as he was fond of calling himself, which means every sort and condition

of mankind, anxious to compel fortune by the primeval process, but wholly without capital to develop enterprises.

Now the jury was chiefly composed of ordinary miners. Of these it so happened that a large number had had their horses stolen. They were valuable animals at that period, most difficult to replace, and the owners, therefore, felt their loss acutely. They came to the trial with a fixed and settled intention of striking a blow at horse-stealers, to which end it was necessary that some one, they hardly cared who, should suffer.

They were determined that an example should be made. It would do good and prevent others from being so immoral and short-sighted as to rob honest miners.

'This Trevanion,' they reasoned, 'had really been mixed up with the Lawless crowd, and a worse lot, now it turned out, had never been seen near Ballarat.'

It was argued that the evidence went to

show that he had been a known friend and an intimate of the family at the place with the native name, and had been seen there when horse-stealing on a large scale was being carried on.

'Kate Lawless swore point-blank to his having been away with her brothers long before the Lawless crowd had come to Growlers'. Trooper Donnellan had sworn to seeing him there. Hiram Edwards, the Yankee digger, had seen him there, and other miners. They had no call to have a down on him, even if Dayrell and the girl had.

'Besides these, Tessie Lawless, who every one knew was a straight girl, and wouldn't have said a word against him for the world if she could have helped it—even *she* had to confess that she had seen him at Eumeralla.'

'What about this chap that was said to be the dead image of him?' asked a younger juror. 'It was hard lines to be lagged innocent through another cove's work.'

'Well, they might believe that if they

liked; it was put up, some thought. Jack Polwarth and his wife, like all these Cousin Jacks, would swear anything for a Cornishman. Mr. Stirling was a nice chap, but he was a banker, and wasn't likely to go back on a man with a good account. Mrs. Delf was a good sort, but Trevanion used her house regular and spent his money free. They knew what that meant. His mind was made up. If Ned Lawless, as was waiting for his sentence, was in it, Trevanion was too. He must face the music. He'd be let off light, but it would be a lesson to him. If they didn't shop some one over this racket there wouldn't be a horse left on the field by Christmas.'

At different times, and from different speakers, such was the general tone and substance of the arguments advanced by the majority. The minority defended their position, and from time to time denied that sufficient evidence had been furnished to show guilty knowledge or participation in

crime on the part of the prisoner. But, after several hours spent in debate, the minority yielded, disinclination to be locked up all night lending force to the logic of their opponents.

When the jury marched into court, after notice by the sheriff's officer to the judge that they had agreed, a hush of anxious silence reigned throughout the building. Lance stood up fearless and erect, as a soldier faces the firing-party at his execution. Ned Lawless never changed his position, but seemed as careless and unenvious as the youngest lad in court.

'How say you, gentlemen of the jury?' said the judge's associate, a very young gentleman, with discretion, however, beyond his years. 'Do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty?'

There was an air of solemnity pervading the jurors generally, from which Mr. England at once deduced an adverse verdict. The women fastened their eyes upon the foreman

with eager expectation or painful anxiety; all save Kate Lawless. For all her emotion displayed, expressed in her countenance, the prisoners might have been Chinamen charged with stealing cabbages.

There was a slight pause, after which the foreman, a burly digger who had been a 'forty-niner' in California, and had seen the first rush at Turon, uttered the word 'Guilty!' The effect of the announcement was electrical. A tumult seemed imminent. The great crowd swayed and surged as if suddenly stirred to unwonted action. Groans mingled with hisses were heard; women's cries and sobs, above which rose a girl's hysterical shriek, thrilling and prolonged, temporarily in the ascendant. The deep murmur of indignation seemed about to swell into riotous shouting, when an additional force of police appeared at the outer entrance, by whom, after vigorous expostulation, order was restored.

The judge proceeded to pass sentence, contenting himself with telling the jury

that 'they had proved themselves scrupulous guardians of the public welfare, and had not allowed themselves to be swayed by considerations of mercy. Their grasp of the facts of the case was doubtless most comprehensive. It was their verdict, not his. They had accepted the sole responsibility. Launcelot Trevanion, the sentence of the court is that you be imprisoned in Her Majesty's Gaol at Ballarat, and kept to hard labour for the term of two years. Edward Lawless, the sentence of the court is that you be imprisoned in Her Majesty's Gaol at Pentridge, and kept to hard labour for the term of five years. Let the prisoners be removed.'

Then the disorder of the crowd, previously restrained, burst all bounds, and appeared to become ungovernable. Tessie Lawless fell forward in a faint and was carried out. Mrs. Polwarth shook her fist in the direction of the sacred judgment-seat, and declared in resonant tones that more would come of this

if things were not mended. Snatching Tottie up, she and Mrs. Delf followed in the wake of Mr. Stirling and Hastings, continuing to impeach the existing order of things judicial, and declaring 'that an honest man and a gentleman had no show in a country like this, where straight folks' oaths counted for nought; where policemen and lying jades had power to shut up in prison a man whose shoes in England they wouldn't have been allowed to black.'

'End of first act of the melodrama,' said Hastings to Charlie Stirling, with grim pleasantry. 'Audience gone out for refreshment. "What may happen to a man in Victoria!" as the Port Phillip *Patriot* said the other day. Poor Lance! it makes me feel revolutionary too.'

. . . . .

The end had come. With a hoarse murmur, half-repressed but none the less sullen and resentful, the crowd surged outward from the court. A strong body of police escorted the

prisoners to the van, in which, despite of threatened obstruction from some of the Growlers' Gully contingent, they were placed and driven towards the gaol, which, built on a lofty eminence, was nearly a mile from the court-house. Ned Lawless preserved his ordinary cheerful indifference, nodding to more than one acquaintance in the crowd, as who should say, 'They don't have me for no five years, you bet!'

But Lance moved like a man in a dream. The force of the blow seemed to have arrested the ordinary action of the brain. 'Guilty! *Two years' imprisonment!* Oh, God! Was it possible! and not some evil dream from which he would wake, as in the days of his boyhood, to find himself free and happy. It could not be. The Almighty could not be so cruel, so merciless, could not suffer a wrong so foul, so false to every principle of right, truth, justice! This hideous phantasmagoria would vanish, and he, Lance Trevanion, would find himself back at

Number Six, hailing the dawn with joy, ready to sing aloud as he left his couch with pure elation of spirits.'

The actuality of changed conditions was brought home to him by the prompt alteration of treatment to which he was subjected on arriving at the gaol. Marched through a large yard in which a number of prisoners were sitting or standing aimlessly about, Lance became aware that a great change had taken place in his status and prestige. Before this he was only on committal; for all the prison authorities knew, he might be acquitted, and walk forth from court unstained in reputation.

But now things were different. He was a prisoner under sentence,—bound to conform to the regulations of the establishment,—who must *obey orders*;—do, in plain words, what he was told, no matter in what tone or manner couched, must perform menial services, descend from his former position to be the servant of servants, nay more, their dumb

and unresisting slave, unless he saw fit to defy the terrible and crushing weight of prison authority. Should he submit? he asked himself, sitting down on the scanty bedding, neatly folded on a narrow board.

'Should he submit? or rather should he not give volcanic vent to his untamed temper, strangle the warder who next came to his cell, and "run amok," scattering the gaol guards, dying by a rifle bullet rather than by the slower but not less certain action of the prison atmosphere? Had it not killed so many another, born, like him, to a life of freedom?—and yet—he was young—so young! Life had joys in store—for a man of three-and-twenty, even if he had to waste two years in this thrice accursed living tomb! Disgrace! dishonour! Of course it was—would be all the days of his life. Still there were other countries—other worlds, almost, of which he had since his arrival in Australia heard more than all his schooling had taught him. The Pacific Slope; the South-Sea Islands;

the Argentine Republic; New Mexico; Texas; Colorado! These were localities of which many a miner talked as familiarly as Jack Polwarth of Cornwall or Devon. Two years would pass somehow. How many weeks was it? A hundred and more! The judge, however, had ordered the time he had spent under committal to be deducted from the whole term—that was something. Well, he would see it out. He had friends still who were staunch and true. He would change his name and go to one of those places in the New World where men were not too particular about their associates' former lives—as long as they paid their way and lived a manly life. But home! Home to Wychwood! Home to his father and Estelle! Never! No! He could not look them in the face again.'

These reflections were brought to a close abruptly by the sudden opening of the cell door and the entrance of two warders, one of whom carried a suit of prison clothes. One was a tall powerful man with a hard expression

of countenance and a cruel mouth. He looked at Lance with a cold, scrutinising air.

'Stand up, prisoner Trevanion,' he said, as if reading out of a book, 'and the next time you hear your cell door open comply with the regulations.'

'What regulations?' inquired Lance.

'They're on that board,' pointing to a small board placed in a corner of the cell. 'You can read, I expect? Now, strip, and dress yourself in this uniform.'

Disencumbering himself of his ordinary garments, Lance soon found himself attired in a striped suit of coarse cloth, fitted also with rough blucher boots and a woollen cap.

'Follow Warder Jackson.'

The shorter warder grinned: 'You've got to see the barber and the photographer next. You won't hardly know yourself, will he, Bracker? We've got yer photer' before you was took, and now all we want is yer jug likeness. Then we have yer both ways in case yer gives us leg-bail. Turn.'

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They halted in a wide passage where a man in prison garb stood by a camera. He had been a photographer before committing the forgery for which he was imprisoned. His talents were now utilised in securing likenesses of his fellow-prisoners, a modern gaol invention which had proved of immense value in the identification of criminals who had either escaped or had committed fresh crimes.

Before being placed in position a man came out of a passage bearing a razor, with shaving materials and scissors of formidable size.

'Sit down,' said the tall warder, pointing to a bench, 'the gaol barber will cut your hair now and shave you, after this he will shave you twice a week and cut your hair every fortnight.' Subduing a frenzied impulse to seize the razor, cut every one's throat and his own afterwards, Lance sat down, and in a marvellously short time found his face denuded of moustache and whisker, while his head felt strangely cold and bristly. He submitted,

vacantly staring and unresistingly, to being placed in the position proper for the apparatus. When the negative came out and was shown to him exultingly as a first-rate likeness he did not recognise himself.

This creature in the repulsive and bizarre habiliments, with cropped head and hairless face as of a patient in a lunatic asylum. Was this really himself? Was this Lance Trevanion? It could not be, unless he had gone mad. Perhaps he had without knowing it; men did not know when they lost their reason, so he had read, or how would they persist in saying they were sane? His head was burning, his eyes darkened, he gasped for breath, and before either warder could save him, fell prone and heavily on the stone floor.

. . . . .

He recovered to find himself in the cell to which he had first been taken. He was sitting upon the two blankets which represented bed and bedding for a hard-labour prisoner, and had been considerately propped up against an

angle of the wall. He had been 'under observation' of a warder unconsciously since being carried there. This official was enabled to look in through a small barred aperture for that purpose, placed in the cell door. When the prisoner struggled into consciousness he departed, leaving Lance to realise his position and to compose his thoughts.

Merciful heaven! what thoughts were his! Let those say who have suddenly awakened to the consciousness of crime, not only alleged but legally proved; who as criminals, in spite of denial and protest, have been tried and sentenced. To the awakened knowledge of dishonour fixed, public, irrevocable! A mark for the pity of friends, for the scorn of strangers, for the chuckling triumph of enemies! Up to a certain stage of legal conflict imagination cheats the boding heart with hope of release, victory, sudden good fortune.

But, the verdict once delivered, the sentence pronounced, hope trails her wings and

abandons the fated victim; faith permits the lamp to burn so low that a breath of unbelief suffices to extinguish it; charity flees in dismay from frenzied cries and imprecations. Then this is the opportunity of the enemy of mankind. This demon train finds easy entrance into the ruined fortress of the soul. The furies are not idle. Remorse, revenge, jealousy, cruel as the grave, all the unclean and baser spirits ravenous for his soul, forsaken of God and man, as he holds himself to be, gather around the scapegoat of society as the diablotins around the corpse of the physician in Doré's terrible engraving. A carnival of evil, weird and Dantesque, begins in the lonely cell. In that hour, unless his guardian angel has the power to shield him from the dread assault of the lower forces, a transformation, such as was but fabled in old classic days, takes place. The higher qualities, the loftier aspirations, the old beliefs in honour, valour, virtue, and justice take flight for ever, while the brute

attributes stalk forth threatening and unchallenged.

Day after day Lance Trevanion performed mechanically his portion of appointed work among the prison herd. To them he spoke no word. When locked up with the rest for the long long solitary night, which commenced before dark and did not end till after sunrise, under gaol rules, he sat brooding over his woes. Stirling had called with printed permission from the visiting justice to see prisoner Trevanion, but he refused to meet him. How could he bear that any of his former friends should look upon him degraded and repulsive of aspect? No! He would never see them more—while in this hateful prison-house at least. Afterwards, if he were living and not turned into a wild beast, he would consider. Friends! How *could* a man have friends while suffering this degradation?

Towards the warders his demeanour was silent rather than sullen, but he could not be induced by threat or persuasion to affect the

respectfulness which is, by regulation, enjoined between prisoners and officials. These last were indifferent, to do them justice, regarding Lance as 'a swell chap as had got it hot, and was a bit off his chump.' The exception to this state of feeling was Bracker, the head warder, who desired to be regarded with awe, and was irritable at the slightest failure of etiquette. His manner, devoid of the faintest trace of sympathy, was harsh and overbearing. To the higher class of prisoners he was especially distasteful, and from this knowledge, or other reason, they were the inmates towards whom he appeared to have the strongest dislike. It may easily be imagined that although the visiting magistrate, to whom is entrusted the duty of trying and punishing all descriptions of prison offences, is presumably impartial, yet it is within the power of any gaol official, if actuated by malicious feelings, to irritate a prisoner to the verge of frenzy, and afterwards to ensure his punishment under form of law. The trial takes

place within the walls of the gaol. The warders give their evidence on oath. In a general way they corroborate each other's testimony. It is not difficult to foretell, even though the magistrate be acute and discriminating, how the decision will go. The punishments permitted in prison vary in severity. Confinement in a solitary cell with half rations, or even bread and water, for periods varying from three days to a fortnight, mark the initiatory stage of repression. Then comes the dark cell, an experience which awes the boldest.

After which, for insubordination coupled with unusual violence of speech or action, flogging may be inflicted, if a second magistrate be present at the hearing of the case. This was the code to which Lance Trevanion now found himself amenable. All ignorant of its pains and penalties, he bore himself with a sullen contempt alike of the tasks and routine observances by regulation imposed upon all prisoners. He obeyed, indeed, but

with an air of indifference which provoked Bracker, who secretly resolved to 'break' him, as the prison slang goes. To that end he commenced a line of conduct which he had seldom known in his extended experience to fail. More than once, however, in his career, Bracker had been accused of cruelty to prisoners. At the last gaol where he had served the visiting magistrate had come to the conclusion that these repeated charges were not entirely without foundation, and so reporting, his official superior had warned him that if any offence of the kind was proved against him he would be disrated, if not dismissed. It was therefore incumbent on him to be wary and circumspect.

He commenced by speaking roughly to Lance almost every time he entered his cell, compelling him to roll up his blankets several times in succession under the pretence of insufficient neatness, swearing at him when there was no one near, and abusing him as a lazy lubber who wouldn't take the trouble

to keep his cell neat and wanted to have a body-servant to wait upon him. Among Mr. Bracker's other engaging qualities was that of being a radical of the deepest dye in politics and a democrat particularly advanced. A child of the masses, he had received just sufficient education to qualify him for a rabid advocacy of certain communistic theories. Arising from this mental enlightenment partly, as well as from the fundamental condition of an envious and malignant nature, was a hatred of privileged orders and an unreasoning spite towards gentlefolk and aristocrats of whatever sex or grade. He had read accounts of the French Revolution and lamented that he had not the power to put in force, in these degenerate days, some of the drastic remedies by which 'the people' of France ameliorated their own condition and wiped out the long score of oppressions which they had suffered at the hands of their natural enemies.

As a man, a politician, and a warder he felt therefore a subtle satisfaction in torment-

ing a member of the hated class secretly. He felt it due to himself also, as a matter of professional etiquette, not to be 'bested' by a prisoner under sentence. He settled to his daily dole of insult with cruel craft and grim resolve. Such may have actuated a plantation overseer in South Carolina towards a contumacious 'nigger' in the good old slave-holding days before the war.

Daily the 'assistant torturer' pursued his course. Mere oaths and continuous abuse were always carefully timed to be out of earshot of all others. Daily Lance Trevanion endured in silence the varied taunts, the bullying tone, which he had never needed to bear from living man before. Indignant scorn lit up his sad despairing eyes at each fresh provocation. More deeply glowed their smouldering fires, but no word came from the tightly-compressed lips; no gesture told of the well-nigh unendurable mental agony within, of the almost unnatural strain.

'Yes, you may look,—blast you for an

infernal stuck-up aristocrat,' Bracker said one morning. 'You know you'd like to rub me out, but you're not game—*not game*—do you hear that? You and all your breed in the old country, and this too, have been living all your lives on the labour of men like me, and treating us like the dirt under your feet, and you can't salute your superiors like another prisoner. You're too grand, I suppose. But by ——, I'll break you down, my fine fellow, before I've done with you. I'll have you on your knees yet. You're not the first that's tried it on with me, and, my word! they paid for it. I'd like you to have seen them knuckle under before I left off dealing with them.'

The next day, on some transparent pretence, Lance was ordered to take up the work of one of the long-sentence prisoners, which involved menial and degrading, not to say disgusting duties. These he performed patiently and mechanically, yet with a far-off look as of a man in a dream. Even this penance was insufficient to appease the malevolence of his

tormentor. He made a practice of standing near, watching his victim, enjoying the spectacle of the captive 'swell' engaged for hours in the meanest conceivable employment. From time to time he made brutal jokes upon the situation with his assistant warders or those prisoners who were always ready for personal reasons to take the side of their taskmasters.

After the night's stillness and respite—stillness how oppressive, even terrible in its unbroken silence!—Lance would brace himself to confront anew his bitter fate. He would repeat to himself all the reasons that he could summon for stubborn endurance and patient adherence to the course he had laid down for himself. But with the morning light came his inexorable foe, ordering him here and there, persisting in declaring that he was in the habit of breaking minor regulations, making a laughing-stock of him before other prisoners in every way, driving him along the road which was sure, in Bracker's experience,

to land him in some act of overt insubordination.

One morning, after an hour's trial of every species of aggravation, Lance's patience so far failed him that he turned upon his persecutor and told him that no one but a coward would thus treat a man in his position, and who was unable to defend himself or retaliate. He did not say much, but doubtless committed himself to the extent of infringing the gaol regulations, which enjoin respect and obedience to all officials.

His adversary at once seized his advantage, and ordering him back to his cell locked him up, pushing him roughly inside the door. This portion of his duty performed, he lodged a complaint in due form of insubordination against Launcelot Trevanion, hard-labour prisoner under sentence.

The gaoler held over the case until the end of the week, when Mr. M'Alpine, as visiting magistrate, regularly attended to hear cases and complaints.

The trial of prisoners charged with such offences is conducted *in camera*, the magistrate, the gaoler, the parties to the complaint, and the witnesses being only present. For reasons held to be sufficient, the public and the press are excluded. Evidence on oath is taken down in writing, that the depositions may be afterwards referred to. The magistrate decides on the evidence brought before him. The accused is permitted to call witnesses. But for obvious reasons the warders and the companions in captivity of the culprit or complainant constitute necessarily the only available testimony. Thus it is to be feared that occasionally the scales of justice may be deflected, and though forms are adhered to, wrong-doing triumphs and revenge is wreaked.

So, in the present case, Bracker swore positively that Lance had habitually refused to obey orders, and on this occasion had abused and threatened him in language unfit to be repeated. He handed in a paper on which was written a selection of foul expressions of

his own invention. His tale was corroborated in part by another warder, who had heard Lance speak in an excited tone of voice to the complainant—though he was not near enough to catch the sense of his words. One of the prisoners—mindful of favours to come—'swore up' in Bracker's interest, and more circumstantially confirmed his story. Against this weight of evidence Lance's denial availed nothing. His resentful demeanour tended to prejudice Mr. M'Alpine against him as being mutinous and defiant. There was no little difficulty in preserving order among the desperate *détenus* of the day, as it was. The sternest repression was thought necessary. In view of example and deterrent effect, Lance was therefore sentenced—after an admonition of curt severity—to a month's solitary confinement upon bread and water, the last week to be passed in the dark cell.

The ill-concealed triumph depicted on Bracker's countenance was hard to bear. The solitary cell, the meagre fare, often unduly

abridged, represented to a man of Lance's temperament and experiences the extremity of human wretchedness. But a sharper sting was added by Bracker's daily jeers: 'So you won't give a civil answer yet when you're spoke to,' he said, one afternoon, stirring Lance rudely with his foot. 'And you won't stand up when you're told? Wait till to-morrow, when you're due for the dark 'un—seven days and seven nights! That'll bleach you, my flash horse-thief, like a stick of celery! I'll take the steel out of yer before I've done! Bigger chaps than you have been straightened here before now!'

On the next morning, accordingly, Lance was marched to the dark cell, and thrust in so roughly that, weakened as he was by his Lenten diet, he fell down, bruised and half-fainting. There was barely sufficient room in the small circular cell for him to lie at length, and as he regained a sitting posture and strained his eyesight to discover one ray of light amid the almost palpable darkness, he

realised fully the utter desolation and horror of his position. Despair took possession of him. Forsaken of God and man, as he deemed himself to be, he raved and blasphemed like a maniac, ceasing only when sheer exhaustion brought on a stupor of insensibility, from which he passed into perturbed and fitful slumbers.

He awoke only to undergo with partially renewed faculties still keener miseries. Unaware of the time which he had passed in sleep, he was ignorant whether it was day or night. No sound penetrated the thick walls of the cell. The Cimmerian gloom was unrelieved by the faintest pencil of light. Had he been dead and entombed he could not have been more utterly separated from knowledge of the outer world—from communion with the living. Days seemed to have passed since he first entered the cell. His brain throbbed. His heart-beats were plainly audible to him in the horrible silence. Delirious fancies commenced to assail him. He saw his father's form as he had last seen it, with visage stern and

inflexible. He seemed to say: 'All that I foresaw has come to pass. You have dishonoured an ancient name!—blotted a stainless escutcheon! Die, and make no sign!'

Then his cousin Estelle's sweet face came slowly out of the gloom, gazing upon him with sorrowful, angelic pity. The infinite tenderness, the boundless compassion of love, shone in her starry eyes, which, in his vision, commenced to irradiate the gloomy vault. Clearer grew the outlines of her form — a celestial brightness appeared to render visible every outline of her form, every lineament of her countenance, as she inclined herself as if to raise him from his recumbent position. He threw up his arms with a cry of joyous recognition. The action appeared to recall his wandering senses. The impenetrable dungeon gloom again closed over him like a descending iron platform. A steel band appeared to compress and still more tightly environ his brain, until a death-like swoon terminated simultaneously both agony and sensation.

CHAPTER XIV

When Lance issued from the dark cell and was relegated to ordinary confinement, he fully justified Bracker's anticipations in one respect. He was 'bleached,' as that official had described the change of complexion likely to result. His face was ashen white, his eyes had a vacant stare like those of a blind man. He staggered from weakness, so that the warders were fain to hold him up more than once. When addressed he made no answer. It seemed as if his senses had suffered partial obliteration. Bracker was not present when his victim was returned to his cell after serving the full term of punishment. The other warders, who had no special dislike to him, were indulgent rather than otherwise in their treatment and comments.

'You're a bit low, Trevanion,' one of them said; 'I'd ask to see the doctor if I were you, and get sent to hospital for a week or two. He'll order you wine, and soup, and things. You'll be slipping your cable like that other chap Bracker got into trouble about, if you don't mind.'

Lance made no reply. He sat down slowly and doubtfully upon the folded blankets at the farther end of the cell, steadying himself with difficulty against the angle of the wall.

'Now, you take my tip,' said the elder of the two men to his fellow as they left, after bolting the cell door with the clang inseparable from prison life, 'that chap will do one of three things before a month's out. Bracker's been running him too hard. He's a well-bred 'un, and they won't stand driving. He'll either die, go mad, or——'

'Or what?' said the younger man.

'Well, Bracker had better look out. Some fine morning he'll have Trevanion's fingers in

his throat, and he mayn't find it so easy to get 'em slacked off again. I've known that happen before now. And when the chap was choked off it didn't matter to Dawkins. *He* was the warder. It happened when I was at the stockade.'

'Why didn't it matter?'

'Because *Dawkins was dead!* The chap laughed when they dragged him off, and said they might do what they liked with him. He'd settled Dawkins, and that was all he cared for in the world. They might hang him now, and welcome.'

'And did they?'

'Of course they did, but we old hands knew Dawkins had been tantalising him; it was a way of his with some prisoners, and this cove made up his mind to rub him out. He got him to rights, safe enough.'

'Hadn't we better tell Bracker?'

'What for? He thinks he knows everything, and wouldn't thank us. Likely think we'd been putting up something to get his

place. Let him take his chance like another man.'

. . . . .

When the medical officer saw Lance he ordered his immediate removal to the hospital ward. He said the prisoner was dangerously low and feeble; that his health had suffered more than could be accounted for; and that there were certain bruises and excoriations which could not have been produced in any ordinary way. He spoke kindly to Lance, and advised him to follow his treatment and diet marked out for him, and to be more cheerful and resigned if he wished to get well and come safely through his imprisonment.

'You're only a young man, Trevanion,' he would say. 'After this couple of years are out there is nothing to prevent your going to the United States, or to any other part of the world where people have never heard of you, of Ballarat—hardly of Australia, for that matter. And what a deal of life there is to come for you—the best part too. Take

courage and make up your mind to bear the necessary hardship of your sentence, and look forward to the day when you will go forth a free man.'

. . . . .

Whether acted upon by this well-meant advice, or following out some course of action nurtured like the fungus of a dungeon in the dark depths of his brooding heart, a change took place in the sullen captive's mien. He seemed thankful for the 'medical comforts' doled out to him, and availed himself of them readily. He listened respectfully to the chaplain and gaol surgeon, and when, after a fortnight's treatment in the hospital ward, he was reported fit for the ordinary discipline of the gaol, the warders with one exception declared that they would not have known him to be the same man.

The ordinary routine of prison life is scarcely calculated to develop the finer feelings in the keepers of the wild beasts in human form over whom they hold watch and

ward. Boundless dissimulation, craft and subtlety, tameless ferocity, ruthless cruelty, are their leading characteristics. Apparently peaceable and harmless, theirs is but the guile of the red Indian or the dark-souled Hindoo, biding his time until the hour comes for murder and rapine. Let but the keeper relax vigilance; let the sentinel slumber at his post, and mutiny and murder are prompt to unmask. Still, with this knowledge drilled into them by decades of experience, the ordinary prison officials are just if not merciful, strict but not severe; while their own discipline is so rigorous that any departure from regulations is sternly and invariably visited on the offending official.

Bracker was an exception—for the credit of the department it must be admitted that he was the only man in that great prison-house who would have acted as he did towards any prisoner, however vexatious.

As Lance passed into his cell he saw his oppressor watching him with the expression

he knew so well. He was not long left in suspense.

'Didn't Saunders complain of not being strong enough for the wood and water work, Jackson?'

'Yes, sir,' replied the under warder.

'Well, take this man here and put him in his place. He's fat and lazy enough after his loafing in the hospital to do a little work again.'

'This way, Trevanion,' said the warder. 'You've got to work in the lower yard.'

As he passed Bracker their eyes met for an instant.

'You're not worked down yet, my man,' said Bracker, with an insolent laugh. 'Wait till you've had another month's graft where I'm going to put ye. "Jimmy Ducks" aboard an emigrant ship's a fool to it.'

Lance drew himself up for an instant and looked full into his tormentor's face. The cruel cowardly eyes fell for a moment before the gaze of the patrician, degraded and de-

spairing as he was. Then the warder quietly pushed him on.

'Don't cross him, if you take my advice,' he said. 'He's a devil all out when he goes for a prisoner, and I never knew one that didn't come off worst in the end. You lie low for a bit and give him his head. The doctor's your friend now, and he'll see he doesn't crowd you.'

Lance nodded his head in recognition of the kindness of the man's intention, then silently commenced his laborious and uncongenial task. When he returned to his cell at night worn out and exhausted by the unwonted toil, hardly recovered indeed from the pitiable weakness to which he had been reduced, he swore a bitter oath and then and there registered an unholy vow.

From that hour he awaited but opportunity to wreak a full measure of vengeance upon his adversary. He felt his strength declining day by day. Daily did he endure the cheap taunt, the cruel mockery, the ingenious ex-

pedients, by which Bracker sought to intensify his misery. But a single chance he would yet give to him, if he had the manhood to accept it.

One morning he addressed him with the usual salute.

'I wish to speak a few words to you, and before I do so I wish you to understand that I mean no—no—disrespect——'

'Speak and be d—d,' was Bracker's courteous rejoinder.

'It is only this. You have been what the people here would call "running me,"—that is, putting me to work above my strength, insulting me habitually as well. Why you should do so is best known to yourself. I can't stand it much longer. If you will leave off this line of conduct and treat me fairly, like any other prisoner, I will promise on my part to—to—behave well and reasonably. Don't decide in a hurry—it may cost both our lives.'

Bracker laughed aloud. He stopped to look at Lance more than once, then he laughed

as at too exquisite a joke. It was the mockery of a fiend exulting in the agonies of a demon-tortured soul.

He misconceived the situation. He concluded that his captive's courage had failed him; that henceforth he would be able to treat him with the contemptuous cruelty with which he was wont to finish his persecutions. He triumphed in his foresight, and could not forbear showing a cowardly exultation.

'So you've dropped down to it at last, my flash horse-duffer, have you? You've shown the white feather that I always knew was in you—a rank cur from the beginning, with all your brag. By God! I'll make it hotter than ever for you, just for this very bit of impudence. D—n ye! Get back to your muck.'

As he spoke the last words, ending with a foul expression, he had drawn near Lance, and raising his foot as if for a contemptuous kick, he placed his hands on his shoulders. The long corridor between the cells was for

the moment without a second warder. With a panther-like bound Lance sprang forward, and in another moment his hands were at Bracker's throat, clutching with the grasp that death alone relaxes.

'Dog!' he ground out between his teeth. 'Your last hour is come. Die, wretch, and go to hell—die, if you had a hundred lives, scoundrel and villain that you are—die for your cruelty to a helpless wretch that never did you harm!'

So sudden was the onslaught that Bracker, though a powerful man, had no chance of resistance, never dreaming that the cowed convict, as he took Lance to be, would turn upon him. In another moment he was on his back on the floor of the cell, his foe with knee on chest awaiting the moment when the blanched features should display no sign of life, nor abating for one second the deadly gripe of the slayer of his kind.

Of his own safety—of his assured doom for killing a prison official—he thought not.

The blood fury was on him. His unendurable wrongs, his daily torment, had reached the point of desperation when the human animal turns at bay, disregarding alike the hunter's spear, the baying hound, the fast-flowing life-blood.

Another minutest subdivision of time would have settled the matter. Another dead warder would have been found by the side of a reckless and desperate prisoner. The usual inquest would have been held, when, after a verdict of wilful murder, the rope or a sentence of imprisonment for life would have terminated all public interest for a season.

But in mercy or otherwise to Mr. Bracker an attendant accidentally returned to the corridor and noticed the open cell door. This, of course, was irregular. Rushing towards it he was just in time—hardly a second too soon — to prevent Mr. Bracker, 'our late respected head warder of Ballarat gaol,' as he would have been styled, from posing as a

corpse, and Lance Trevanion, late of Wychwood, Cornwall, from becoming a murderer!

Some considerable time elapsed before Mr. Bracker returned fully to his senses after regaining consciousness. He had been hurled to the cell floor with such violence that concussion of the brain had taken place, while his swollen throat testified to the deadly gripe of the victim who had so nearly turned the table upon his tormentor. It was fully a week before he was in a condition to give evidence before the Visiting Justice. The interval Lance was condemned to spend in 'solitary,' to be nourished wholly on bread and water,—to be abandoned in fact to the society of the Furies, which none the less mordantly than in the days of the world's green youth rend the heart and shatter the brain of their ill-fated or guilty victim.

Lance was rapidly passing from one stage of misery to the other, from the unmerciful to the merciful woe. As he sat or lay in his cell the long hours through, the thought

crossed his brain, revelled and ran riot there, that if he had only persevered in his policy of endurance, if he had been strong and patient instead of weak and impulsive, this needed not to have happened. He might probably have found some door of escape from his tribulation, not literally of course, but through the clergyman and the Visiting Justice, the latter of whom would have been most uncompromising in punishing an official who misused his power.

Now that the storm of passion was over, the fury spent, the *brevis insania* passed away, calmer reflection would intrude. To what further sentence had he rendered himself liable? Would he be committed for attempted murder, or would it be manslaughter? Should he be condemned to a further sentence of years—long years of imprisonment? Might he not be *hanged* for the attempt to commit the capital offence? No doubt he intended to kill Bracker—that he would not deny. His mind was made up.

If a shameful death or long imprisonment was to be his doom, he would rid himself of a worthless life. He had procured the means of self-destruction during his first remand. The feeling aroused among his fellow-captives by his daring attempt to take the life of his gaoler was peculiar and exceptional. Though many of the prisoners from motive of policy were subservient to Bracker, he was liked by no one. He had been known to be trying to 'break' or crush Trevanion. Cruelties and unnecessary severity springing from the irresponsible use of power are presumably not unknown in gaols. But the prison herd knows that at a certain point despair sets in. Reckless retribution follows, and the life of the agent or leading actor in the tragedy nearly always exacted counts with himself and his fellows merely as dust in the balance.

The criminals like to think that from their midst will arise at least one man who devotes himself to sacrifice, so only may he avenge

himself and them upon their enemy. The time comes, and with curious certainty the man. Then the words of the first warder come true. The sullen patience of the harassed convict, who rarely resents routine discipline, however severe, becomes exhausted, and the debt is paid in full by a brutal murder or a life-long injury. Let it be borne in mind that 'early in the fifties' the problem of successful goldfield management was yet unsolved in Australia. The legislation had been chiefly tentative; the police and prison arrangements were incomplete. From the seething mass of the mining population, not always ruled with tact or temper, smarting under alleged injustice and excited by the enormous yield of the precious metal, arose a dangerously large and increasing criminal class. The overcrowded gaols, ample for a pastoral colony, were unable to contain them. Among the more experienced officers apprehensions of a revolt of the mining population —unhappily but too well founded—began to

assume the appearance of certainty. In such event the prisoners, if altogether centralised or confined inland, might easily be liberated —would hardly fail to be so on the first outbreak. Considering these contingencies, the Government of the day determined to relieve the pressure upon the metropolitan gaols by establishing prison hulks. Vessels moored in the waters of Williamstown Bay could be more easily guarded — would obviously be more difficult to escape from. Ships by scores, deserted by their crews, lay at anchor motionless and tenantless as that of the Ancient Mariner. Their owners were too happy to sell at any reasonable price. The idea was approved—not sooner approved than acted upon. The *President*, the *Success*, the *Sacramento*, the *Deborah*, were purchased and forthwith proclaimed to be, and to be considered, Her Majesty's gaols. They became from that day floating prisons. There were those long after who did not hesitate to designate them as floating hells.

One of the leading ideas connected with the scheme was the compulsory labour of the convicts, who, it was thought, might be employed beneficially to themselves and to the state in building at Williamstown—then a chief port of Melbourne—wharves, light-houses, and docks. There were millions of tons of blue-stone—a species of volcanic trap—to be had near the shore for the quarrying. Harbour accommodation was miserably insufficient. The labour of a thousand men was a valuable consideration in that day of dearth of every kind of manual labour. Long afterwards the navvies employed in the construction of the Yan Yean aqueduct received one pound sterling per day. At this time double the wage would not have furnished the labour these convicts performed, and in many instances performed well.

The *President* enjoyed the bad eminence of being styled and worked as a strictly penal hulk—an abode for refractory and desperate criminals. Many of these were, in the prison

slang, 'long-sentence men,' incorrigible felons serving a life sentence for repeated offences; men who could not be trusted to work even in the iron-gangs—so skilful and determined were they in all methods of escape. Many of these were doomed never to leave the *President's* gloomy cells but for the coffin and the shroud. Others again, after performing the allotted form of strictly penal and reformatory discipline, were drafted on board the *Success*, where they underwent the more popular and varied experience of working in the quarries on the mainland—in irons, it is true, but having the excitement of a daily voyage to and fro in one of the barges used for the purpose.

. . . . .

When Lance was brought up for trial he found to his relief—if indeed anything could have afforded him a gleam of satisfaction—that in spite of the heinousness of his offence—penally considered—a favourable feeling had sprung up with regard to him. Now that Bracker had in their opinion got his

deserts, several of the 'good conduct' prisoners came forward with voluntary statements. They had seen the injured man knocking about the prisoner Trevanion. He was always 'tantalising,' and seemed to want to provoke him to a breach of regulations. Had not spoken before, because they were afraid of Bracker, who was well known to be revengeful. It was believed in the gaol (sent round, doubtless, in the wonderful way criminals have of communicating with each other) that he had caused a prisoner in another gaol to hang himself.

Two warders had also noticed his conduct to prisoner Trevanion when he came out of hospital. Thought it severe and unnecessary. The prisoner's own statement was taken on oath. He admitted the offence, but averred that he had become reckless through consistent ill-treatment. Bracker, of course, denied everything in the most unabashed manner, looking with evil eye upon the recalcitrant warders and the 'good conduct' prisoners. But the

papers had been sent for in the last inquiry made into his conduct, also upon a charge of cruelty to prisoners. The evidence, unfortunately for him, was very similar. Mr. M'Alpine, who was an unsparing foe to all official misconduct, at once decided against him. After a terrific lecture, he reminded Bracker that he had been disrated for a former offence of a like nature. He should recommend him, therefore, for dismissal, which recommendation, to the general joy of the inhabitants of the Ballarat gaol, was promptly carried out.

'Prisoner Trevanion, whose conduct if condoned must have a bad effect upon the other prisoners (*other prisoners*, how the words fell like drops of molten lead upon his heart!), is ordered to serve the rest of his sentence on board Her Majesty's hulks at Williamstown.'

. . . . .

Two stern-faced men set out from Lynn
In the cold and heavy mist,
And Eugene Aram walked between
With gyves upon his wrists.

This verse, from Hood's pathetic ballad, Lance had been fond of and learned by heart as a schoolboy, little dreaming how closely the circumstances would apply to himself in the after-time. It *would* keep ringing through his brain with incessant automatic iteration, as Lance found himself early next morning driven off to Ballarat, leg-ironed and handcuffed, in charge of two warders. The two men, with himself in the centre, took their seats in the back part of Cobb's coach, and in company with various other passengers, clerical and lay, male and female, as is the slightly unfair practice of the Government, looking at it from the standpoint of the travelling public. However, no great inconvenience having so far resulted, the sentimental objection to travel with criminals has lessened. And being decidedly the more economical mode of escort, as far as the Government is concerned, the arrangement is continued.

Of course glances of pitying wonder were cast from time to time, especially by the

female passengers in the crowded coach, at the men in police uniform and the sad, sallow, clean-shaved man sitting between them. One young girl alone, though sitting nearly opposite, had exhibited no interest in the trio. She sat near the right-hand door of the coach. Closely veiled, she had turned her head towards the town and the crowd always attendant on the departure of a coach.

The clock struck six. The powerful high-conditioned horses sprang at their collars, obedient to the practised hand of 'Cabbage-tree Ned,' one of the 'stage' heroes of the period. The heavily-laden coach swayed on its thorough-brace springs and rattled down Sturt Street at the rate of twelve miles an hour. More than once had Lance been the envied occupant of the box seat beside this very driver, who, smoking the proffered cigar, was as civil to Trevanion of Number Six as an official of his exalted position could afford to be to any one.

And now he sat, chained and alone,
The 'warder' by his side,
The plume, the helm, the charger gone, etc.

Gone, gone, indeed,—how many things had gone!—fame and fortune, hope, honour,—all that made life worth living. The sooner that wretched dishonoured life went too, the better for all. Thank God, it would be easy to drop overboard from barge or boat—the waters of the bay had ended the sorrows of many a hopeless wretch, it was said. The heavy irons provided for a quick and silent escape from life's weary burden.

An involuntary sigh, as the sequel to the train of thought, from the fettered captive, together with a faint but distinct tinkle from his leg-irons, appeared to arouse the girl from her reverie.

She gazed at the prisoner long and earnestly, then with a cry of grief and despair which thrilled the hearts of all who heard her she threw herself forward, and clasping his manacled hands within her own looked into

his face, worn and altered in every feature as it was, with the piteous agony of a frightened child.

It was Tessie Lawless!

'Lance! oh, Lance!' she cried in tones so full of anguish that the warders forbore to interfere, and the coach passengers listened in sympathetic wonder. 'Is this what they have brought you to? Oh, wicked wicked girl! Worse and more wicked man! For I know now how they plotted to destroy you. Your blood will be on our heads. Surely we must suffer for this if there's a God. Where are they taking you to? Oh, God! have mercy!'

The driver having inquired tersely into the occasion of the disturbance, and having gathered that a girl had recognised a friend or relation in the prisoner, lighted a fresh cigar and let his horses out adown the incline with the remark that accidents would happen, but a good-looking girl like her had no call to fret; she might have her pick of twenty

new sweethearts long before this one had served his time. Women would go on like that, he supposed though, to the end of the world.

The public, as represented by the twenty inside passengers, did not exhibit undue surprise or other emotion. Some of the women whispered 'poor thing—fine young fellow too —pity he's gone wrong,' and so on. The men kept mostly mute, though not unsympathetic. They were not unused to seeing tragedies acted in everyday life in those unconventional days of the early goldfields. The passions had lacked hiding-places such as are furnished by a highly-civilised community.

The crowded goldfields camp more nearly represented 'board ship' than the provincial life pure and simple, and things were done and said, necessarily *coram publico*, which in more conventional communities would have been wholly suppressed or excited inconvenient remark.

Therefore, after a vain attempt to persuade poor Tessie to moderate her feelings, Lance

was fain to yield to the contagion of her grief. Weakened in mind and body by his late sufferings, softened by the tenderness of her every tone, and touched by the first kind words he had heard since his imprisonment, he was fain, though hating himself for the weakness, to weep for company. As the tears streamed down the convict's grief-worn countenance—tears which he vainly strived to hide with his manacled hands—every heart was touched, and those emotions of our common humanity which ennoble the species were deeply stirred. Murmurs of 'Poor things,' 'Poor girl,' 'Hard lines,' etc., were heard. Even the warders, though unused to the melting mood, were raised from out of their ordinary groove of total indifference to human suffering not provided for by the gaol regulations. After a short colloquy the one nearest to Tessie motioned to the girl to exchange seats, an offer which she thankfully accepted.

There was no dereliction of duty involved

in this charity, which was heartily and unanimously endorsed by their public. Relaxation of discipline was necessarily permitted in the case of escort of prisoners from one part of the country to another. Such a task was generally looked upon in the light of a holiday by warders or police troopers. It involved change of air and scene, higher pay for a time, and with various perquisites and indulgences. All that was required of them was to deliver over their charge safely to the authorities. That being the result, they were allowed a certain latitude with regard to the means. If the prisoner thereby escaped, their punishment was exemplary. It often happened, however, that the prisoner, being a fair sort of fellow (as prisoners go), was conversed and generally associated with on terms of equality. Of course proper security was exacted. A single trooper, camping out through a stretch of thinly-inhabited pastoral country, has been compelled to handcuff himself to the prisoner nightly for his better safeguarding. But

these formalities apart, much cheerful companionship has ere now been enjoyed between the (official) 'wolf and hound.'

Hence, as the first warder observed in a gruff whisper, 'they had no call to bother their heads if the poor chap's girl wanted a yarn with him. It was the last one as he'd see for a spell, unless he fell across a mermaid.' Here the speaker, who had been a ship's carpenter once, growled a hoarse rumbling laugh. 'Let him have his bit o' luck for once. He'd got stiffish times to come, or else they'd heard wrong.'

So Tessie, sitting on the right side of Lance —there being no one to the left of him at the coach-window—leaning her head on his shoulder, commenced to whisper in his ear. The friendly warder studiously gazed at the fast-flying landscape, as if it possessed peculiarly picturesque effects. The second man almost turned his back upon Lance in his anxiety to be out of the reach of confidential communications while Tessie's murmuring

voice, instinct with more than womanly tenderness, sounded in the ear—ay, in the heart of the captive, so lately sullenly despairing of God and man—like the voice of an angel from heaven.

'You may think me immodest, Lance,' she said—'I may call you that now, may I not?—but I don't care. There are times when a woman must follow her own heart, and this is one of them. I would tell you what I feel now if there were hundreds looking on. I cannot help it; and what does my poor life matter? When I think of what you were when I first saw you! full of health, hope, and spirits, with a smile for every one, and under compliment to no living man, I felt as if my heart would burst when I saw you—saw you—as you are!'

Here the girl's tears streamed down like rain—and she sobbed, though striving with all her will power to restrain her feelings—till her slender form shook and trembled in a manner piteous to see. Her forlorn companion gazed

at her silently, with a world of misery in his hollow eyes. Just at that particular juncture the conversation in the coach became, if not more cheerful, decidedly more loud and animated, and their united voices helping to drown poor Tessie's lamentations, some poor opportunity was given her to recover herself.

'You think me very silly,' she said, with a miserable attempt to smile. 'I did not know how much I cared for you until the trial—women don't always. I thought I had a friendly feeling, and no more, till I felt I could have killed Kate—wretch that she is! for the part she took against you. Then I knew—that I loved you! Oh! my God! I know now! But you would never have been told it if you had been free and rich—not now—not now either—except I thought I could do you some good—some good, after helping to ruin you. God forgive me!'

'I have been back to Ballarat, back to Eumeralla and the Snowy River, to other places, too, because I was determined to find

out how the thing was worked between Dayrell and Kate.'

'And did you find out?' Lance said, and his voice sounded strangely hoarse in the girl's ear—even his voice had changed, she thought. 'What fiends there are on earth!'

'I am certain that I have,' she answered. 'I daresay you wondered—and so did I—what made Kate so venomous against you all of a sudden? Dayrell didn't like you because you thought yourself above him, and for another reason, and besides he wanted to get his name up for a conviction, because so many horses had been stolen and the Commissioner had been blaming the police.'

'What was the other reason, Tessie? I never did him any harm.'

'Well, it doesn't matter now, but he—he—chose to fancy he admired me—poor me!—when we lived at Eumeralla. I never could bear the sight of him—and showed it. One of the boys stupidly chaffed him about it

after we came to Growlers', and said I was "gone upon you," as he called it. That foolishness made all the mischief, I believe. He set himself to have you somehow.'

'And he did! May God blast and wither his soul and body, as he has mine!' groaned Lance, with a savage intensity that made the girl shudder.

'Oh, don't—don't!' she cried. 'I can't bear to hear you speak like that, you seem so different when you do. Then, when you were searched, he found a letter which you had half-written to your cousin in England, and out of that he made greater mischief still. He finished it himself in his own way, and then read it to Kate, making her believe that you had been engaged to your cousin all along, and were making game of her as a half-bred, common bush girl that you were amusing yourself with.'

'Then how about seeing me at Eumeralla? *you* swore to that!' said Lance reproachfully, unable to repress his anger as he thought of

the strange medley of fact and fraud by which he had been betrayed.

'I did, God help me!' said poor Tessie, very humbly. 'Why couldn't I swear falsely, like others? It was that villain Trevenna. I have seen *him* since, but only for a moment or two. It is the most extraordinary likeness that ever was seen. I was deceived, and so were the other honest witnesses. He was also in the plot against you. He was an admirer of Kate's, and she played fast and loose with him. When he heard that you and she had met at Growlers', and were seen riding about together, he was furious, and vowed to shoot you if he got a chance. He was in with Ned and Dan in some cross work at Eumeralla, but only showed on occasions. He used to come across from Omeo, where, if all reports are true, the worst villains in all Australia are gathered together.'

The day was cold, and long besides to the crowded passengers, relieved only by a short mid-day halt for refreshment. The roads

chiefly unmade and deep with mud, through which the steaming team rushed, unrelaxing the high rate of speed with which they had started. Their colours were hardly discernible. Along the plank road for twenty miles matters were something better; here the pace was at times little less than full speed. Even then occasionally a loose plank would fly up as a horse trod too near the end, and a shower of mud and water would be impartially distributed. Two persons only felt not the enforced tedium to be a weariness. Lance and Tessie, in the early gloom of a winter evening, were enabled to talk still more at ease. They enjoyed their opportunity, this wintry smile of fortune, as those who might never meet again in life. So many chances were against it. But this strange interview had been most beneficial to Lance. It had softened his heart and revived his drooping, well-nigh extinguished faith in Providence and his fortune. The girl persuaded him to promise that he would do his best to

disarm his gaolers by good conduct. The chances were against his finding a second Bracker. She would find means of communicating with him from Melbourne. Trust her for that! She had already given liberally to his present guards, who were fully convinced that she was a young woman deserving of every consideration.

'You promise me, on your honour,' she said, as the lights of the town and the well-macadamised street warned of the approaching halt.

'My honour?' he said drearily.

'Yes, your honour,' she answered proudly; 'I believe in it, and so will others yet.'

'I promise,' he said; 'may God bless you, Tessie, whatever may be my fate.'

They sat silently, her hands clasped around his, her head against his shoulder.

'Mine is a strange love tale,' she said, 'is it not? But for this meeting, it might never have been told. No living man shall hear such words again from me. And to think that you and I may never meet again!'

The coach stopped. There was the usual bustle of escaping passengers and mislaid luggage, as the girl threw her arms around Trevanion's neck and kissed his lips, his cheeks, his forehead, with passionate fervour.

'You are mine,' she said, 'for this day if for no other, and, unless my heart tells me false, it is the last last time! Do not forget poor Tessie; if she could have saved you with her life you would have been free and happy. May God bless and keep you.'

She descended the coach-steps slowly, and, walking calmly down the lighted street without looking back, was soon lost in the crowd of busy or pleasure-seeking wayfarers.

CHAPTER XV

After the conclusion of the sitting of the Court as presided over by His Honour Judge Buckthorne, when Lance and Ned had been carried off to undergo their allotted sentences, it was observed that Kate Lawless and Sergeant Dayrell, while apparently strolling aimlessly together along the street, were engaged in an earnest and apparently confidential conversation.

'Well, that chap was got to rights if ever a man was,' observed the sergeant. 'There'll be some of the flashness taken out of him before he comes out again.'

The girl looked at him searchingly before she answered. When she did there was no triumph in her voice.

'Poor devil! it *was* hard lines, when you come to think of it. And all for a horse that he knew no more about than the dead! He looked at me, as he walked out, so sad and fierce-like I couldn't help pitying him.'

'You mean you might have pitied him if he hadn't thrown you over for the girl at home—if he hadn't treated you like the dirt beneath his feet after promising to marry you—after amusing himself by making love to you as if you were a South Sea Island *wahine*!'

'Perhaps he did. Suppose he did,' replied the girl musingly, evidently in one of those fits of reactionary regret which so often in the feminine nature—strange and enigmatical always—are prone to succeed the exaltation of passion. 'For all that, I feel sorry, now it's over. I can't get him out of my head, locked up in one of those beastly cells.'

'Your brother Ned's in one too. You don't seem to think of him.'

'No, I don't—not so much. Ned's differ-

ent. He's been working for it these years. He's lost the deal and has to pay up. He's not one to whine either, and I'd take the odds he's out again and in the mountains long before his time's up. But when I think of Lance and what a swell chap he was, so hearty and jolly when we first seen him, I feel like a good cry.'

'Perhaps you'd like to pass him over to Tessie when he comes out,' sneered the sergeant. 'She'd be so happy to console him.'

'I've that feeling for him yet, bad as he's treated me,' said the girl, raising her head and stamping her foot, 'that I'd kill any woman that took him from me, even now. He's played me false and thrown me over, I know, and yet, by George!' she cried, suddenly facing round upon the sergeant, while her eyes flashed and her bosom heaved with sudden passion, 'I wonder if he *did* write all you showed me? I can't read a line, more shame to father and mother that never had me taught like that Tessie. So what's to prevent

you putting down anything you liked and saying he wrote it? Suppose you'd been working a cross all along? Frank Dayrell, if I ever find out as you turned dog on me that way your last hour's come. By ——! I'd shoot you like a crow, and if I didn't I'd find somebody that would. Don't you make any mistake.'

Dayrell smiled in his old scornful way as he pointed out the extreme improbability of Lance's writing to his affianced bride in England in any other way. What else was he to say to her? 'Why, you never thought he would marry you, did you, Kate?'

'Why did he make a fool of me then?' said the girl, standing slightly back and facing the trooper as if, like the tigress which such women are said to resemble, she needed but another spark of anger to cause her to spring upon him and rend with tooth and talon. 'Why shouldn't he marry me? I'd have made him as good a wife as that girl or any other in the world, I don't care who she was. I

know I'm ignorant and all that, but one woman's as good as another if she takes to a man. That makes all the difference, and I'd have blacked his boots and waited on him hand and foot, and been a good woman too, if he'd been true to me—as God hears me, I could—I would!'

And here, wrought up by a strange admixture of feelings—remorse, regret, disappointment, doubt, and suspicion—newly aroused, the half-wild daughter of the woods burst into tears and abandoned herself to the womanly indulgence of a fit of passionate lamentation.

'It's too late now, Kate,' he said after a while, coolly removing his cigar, which he had lighted at the first appearance of lamentation. 'Better clear out for Eumeralla and make it up with Trevenna. I believe you carried on with him till Lance came on the scene. He's a handsome fellow, and Tessie, you know, and some other people couldn't tell the difference.'

Then he laughed in a sardonic, derisive

manner, as though the joke was an exceedingly good one—irresistible indeed.

Kate Lawless dried her eyes and looked keenly at him with an expression of contempt and dislike which, in spite of his habitual indifference, he by no means relished.

'Frank Dayrell,' she said, 'I believe you're the very devil himself; I see your game partly now. You'd a down on Lance because Tessie was gone on him, and wouldn't look at you. That's a nice reason to lag a man for, isn't it? And if you'd play false in one thing, you would in another. I see how you've worked it, partly. When I find out the rest it'll be a bad day for you, mark my words. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye, Miss Lawless!' here he made her a deferential and elaborate bow. 'You'd better be civil though, or I may have to run in Larry Trevenna. That'll make a double widow of you—the man you'll marry and the man you were going to marry. Smart work that, eh?'

'You look out for yourself, Dayrell,' she

replied, as she moved slowly away from him. 'You're pretty smart, but that mightn't save you some day. You take my tip and leave us alone from this day out.'

Thus they parted. The girl walked sullenly away—the sergeant, strolling in another direction, hummed an air from an opera, stepping lightly as might a man without a care in the world. Had he but known the future! How heedless are the feet of men, surrounded by the traps and pitfalls of Fate, all ignorant, mercifully, that a few inches one way or the other means instant, irrevocable destruction. As for the woman, she went on her way and he saw her no more.

'I wonder what the deuce *will* become of the fair Kate?' he said musingly, and half aloud, as he strolled along leisurely towards the police camp. 'If she marries this fellow Trevenna she'll be paid out for her sins, whatever they are. He's the making of one of the most precious scoundrels that even this colony ever saw. The Lawlesses crowd can't teach

him much. If he marries her there'll be murder or something like it before long. I think I see my way to another sensational case before the game's played out—more than one indeed.'

. . . . .

The town at which the coach had stopped, on this his first and memorable journey as a prisoner accommodated with leg-irons and hand-cuffs, was Geelong, to the gaol of which town Lance was relegated for the purpose of being forwarded to the hulk *President.* Accordingly, after due course of procedure, Lance found himself one morning in a police boat seated between his two Ballarat warders in near proximity to the celebrated *Sacramento.* When they came within a certain distance of the vessel they rested on their oars and commenced a conversation. The ship's trumpet replied, but afforded no manner of information to Lance. Apparently the colloquy was satisfactory. The sentry, who had been steadily pointing his musket in their direc-

tion, presented it towards the lighthouse, and all requisite permission being obtained the momentous embarkation was commenced.

The hulk *President* was a plain solid barque of one thousand tons register, broad in the beam. Dutch-built was she, and had been strong to encounter storms, but was destined to defy such forces no more.

On the fore part of her deck an iron roof protected the galley and water-tank, giving her an expression of being settled in life. In front of and around her bows was a planked and railed gangway, along which a warder with a loaded rifle marched to and fro.

The heat of the summer suns reflected from the cloudless sky, the shimmering water plain, had blistered the paint—a staring dreadful yellow it was—upon her weather-worn hull. Armed figures walked on either side of this terrible vessel. Except the solitary boat in which Lance was a passenger, nothing seemed to come near. To his excited fancy she seemed a plague ship. He could imagine the dead in

their heavily-weighted shrouds being cast in scores from her gloomy port-holes. He stared at her in sullen silence. He had lost the habit of ejaculation. What did it matter—what did anything matter? He was in hell. In hell! What difference did the depth of the pit, more or less, make, once within the Inferno?

There was a swell, consequent on a gale which had been blowing on the previous night. The boat rocked and pitched as she came alongside of the grim ungainly hulk. His fetters made it difficult for him to step from the boat to the ladder. He tripped, and one of the warders was constrained to hold him up.

'Look out! you mustn't drop overboard and cheat Her Majesty's Government like Dickson did last month. Blest if you wouldn't go down like a stone with them clinks on.'

A quick regret passed through Lance's heart that he had not dropped quietly overboard, and so exchanged this torture-ship for eternal rest and peace. But he clambered up with

one warder in front and one immediately behind.

At the deck he was met by the first and second officers, to whom an important-looking document was presented by the senior warder who had come down in charge.

'H—m, ha!' remarked the dignitary, opening it with deliberation and then glancing searchingly at Lance. 'Refractory, determined, and—put him into number fifty-six. If lower deck don't suit him, we must move him aft. Show the way, Mr. Grastow.'

The 'way' led down a narrow ladder, the gradient of which was such that the fettered man, heavily weighted as he was, had some difficulty in getting down safe. However, as before, one warder preceding and one following, he was partly supported, partly led. As he touched the deck he looked round, and for an instant laughed aloud at the grim pleasantry which, like a ray of light in a dungeon cell, had found access to his brain. He was on board a slaver! His boyhood rose up

before him, and he saw himself again reading *Tom Cringle's Log* under the King's oak at Wychwood. There were the iron gratings above, through which the sun came grudgingly, which afforded the only air and light to the long low corridor into which the deck had been altered. Rows of small cells on either side, each duly numbered, into which a herd of some forty or fifty chained men were being driven, as it appeared to him. In the gloom of the half-lighted passage their dark or sallow countenances, in which the eyes and teeth alone gleamed in relief, might well have passed for those of negroes. They laughed and talked or cursed and swore with a freedom which surprised Lance, used to the strict and silent rule of the Ballarat gaol. It was their recreation hour, he found. They had returned from their exercise on deck.

As he scanned these foul and hideous countenances, from which all semblance of the higher human attributes had departed, he shuddered involuntarily, and a groan so deep

and hollow came from him that the warders who had accompanied him were affected.

'Don't you take on, Number Fifty-six,' said one, 'it's a deal worse than Ballarat, but you go in for good conduct now and your time won't be so long in runnin' out. See what you've got by behaving awkward, and they're a deal worse, if you go contrairy here, than ever our lot was.'

'Down the ladder,' said the officer of the *President*; 'we've no time to spare in this ship.'

Lower, lower still, another ladder, another deck. Here the gratings were nearer to the floor, the cells were smaller and more numerous, the whole arrangement still more nearly resembling his fancy of the slave-ship. Had there been a row of miserable Africans sitting down, with another row between their knees, and another yet in the same condition, as was formerly the human method of packing the 'goods' so largely dealt in by our good friends

the Spaniards, Portuguese, and French, and indeed our own most merciful and Christian nation, the illusion would have been complete. They would have sold well in Victoria at that time, doubtless, labour being so *very* scarce and valuable. The air, fœtid with the odours and emanations from three hundred men, having even to be filtered through the crowded deck above them, was indescribably offensive. In spite of ordinary precautions, the odour was that of galley-slaves. Below the level of the waters of the bay as this deck was, Lance could hear the waves washing beside the prison-house, while from the cells, the bolts of which were partially drawn and the opening secured with a chain, came ribald songs, yells, and curses, with an occasional noise of weeping and bursts of yet more dreadful laughter.

Walking forward still towards the stern, they came to a cell numbered fifty-six on the south side of the vessel. At no great distance, and dividing it from the after-cabin, which was used as a sort of store-room, was a grating of

massive iron bars extending from one side of the ship to the other.

The padlock was unlocked, the massive bolt shot back from the staple, and Lance saw his habitation. A low, narrow cell, with heavy timber on every side, only excepting a small port-hole narrowing outwards and capable of being closed at will. The length to the concave wall of the vessel's side was about eight feet, the width scarcely six. From two iron hooks hung a rude canvas hammock. Here he must abide for the present. It would depend upon himself whether he remained there.

From the timbers of the vessel's side protruded an iron ring with a short chain dependent from it.

'What's that for?' said one of the Ballarat gaolers.

'Oh, nothing,' returned the hulk warder, 'it's there in case it's wanted.'

The narrow door closed, the heavy bolt shot into its place, the padlock-key turned, and Trevanion was alone and at sea once

more. Once more Lance Trevanion found himself on ship-board, but under what different circumstances. He felt the heaving deck under his feet. The day was dark and squally, and the barque rolled and pitched in a sufficiently lively manner. The familiar movement recalled the scenes which he had loved so well. He was a born sailor, and of the breed of men that joy in the strife of wind and wave. The revulsion of feeling was so great that he staggered and well-nigh fell.

How well he remembered the last time he had been at sea; the voyage out, so free and joyous in spite of minor discomforts; the perfect independence, the hearty, unconventional comradeship, the delight with which all greeted the first step on *terra firma*; the general wonder, excitement, and eager expectation of rapid fortunes to be acquired in this strange new land of gold.

And now he was a chained and guarded felon, reserved for Heaven alone knew what

new degradation, even torture, in this sea dungeon. Long before dark—the days were short in July—a warder came with bread and water.

'When do we go on shore to work?' asked Lance, thinking to adapt himself to his changed condition.

'Work? They don't do no work in the *President*; this is the punishment hulk. All you chaps is supposed to belong to the 'fractory lot—my word! some of 'em just are, and no mistake. You gets one hour a day exercise on deck. Ten on yer's sent up in the cage at a time. The rest of the twenty-four hours has to be took out in the cell.'

'My God!' groaned out the unhappy man, 'can this be true, twenty-three hours in this den? Surely such cruelty can never be permitted.'

'That's about the size of it, Fifty-six,' answered the warder, preparing to lock up and depart. 'And the sooner you make up your mind to man it, the better it'll be for you and

the sooner you'll be drafted to the *Success*, when you'll have a chance of fresh air. So long.'

The lock closed, the bolt clanged, and Lance was left to sit down where the last captive had leaned his weary frame till his prison shoes—not heavy either—had worn into the solid planking, and when at last heart and brain had risen in wild revolt, he had cast away the wasted life which had become so valueless and unendurable.

From the time when the door that closed upon hope and the outer world clanged to, Lance Trevanion sat statue-like and motionless. The day passed, the cell grew darker, the night came with no cessation of the subdued but truly infernal din of noise to which nearly every cell contributed its quota. The wind rose and moaned, the ship rocked more heavily, the waves plashed around and above his cell, and still Lance Trevanion stirred not. He *must* have slept at length, worn out and over-fatigued, for he started suddenly from a

dream of Wychwood and the first meet of the season to feel the sun feebly lighting up his prison, to listen and shudder as his irons clanked with the instinctive movement.

He sat up and gazed around for a while in the half-stupefied condition produced by conflicting sensations. He endeavoured to collect his thoughts and to resolve upon a course of action. What was he to do? At present the mode of life—rather the living death—to which he felt himself condemned seemed intolerable. But much would depend upon the duration of the strictly penal term. If it were a matter of months only, it might be borne. Then he would be 'promoted' to the *Success*, would enjoy the favoured position of being permitted to work for ten hours a day in a quarry—heavily ironed, of course—and on an equality and in company with some of the most atrocious scoundrels that any country had ever produced. It was not an alluring prospect. Still, he had at any rate no actually malignant enemy like Bracker. It might

be possible to establish a friendly feeling with some of his guardians. He would make the attempt. Even escape did not seem so altogether impossible. He remembered Tessie's words. He knew that what one woman could do she would accomplish. A man here and there *had* escaped from the hulks and got clear off, several had been drowned, two had been shot. Still these were fair risks. The twenty-three hours a day in the cell constituted a maddening monotony of captivity. Yet, from whatever reason, whether from the sea air, his unexpected meeting with Tessie Lawless, or 'something which never can be expressed,' Lance Trevanion's spirits rose higher than they had done since the day of his conviction, and in the depth of his saddened heart stirred a feeling that was almost hope.

When his gaoler made his appearance with the one-pound loaf of bread which was to serve for his daily dole and the can of water similarly apportioned, he assumed a cheerful air. 'When do we go up for exercise?' he said.

'Your batch'll be sent up at eleven o'clock, Fifty-six. Then you get down just in time for dinner, half-pound boiled beef for you then, so you can save some for supper; half-pound of vegetables. That'll be the lot.'

'Now look here, I don't know your name —oh, Grastow! what I want to say is, I have only two years to serve. When I get out I shall have plenty of money. I can make it WELL worth your while to help me; what do you say? Is there any harm in that?'

'I don't know as there is, Fifty-six,' replied the gaoler warily. 'But a many of the crew of the *President* (we call 'em the crew among ourselves) says the same thing. When they gets out they nat'rally forgets. What are we to do? We can't summons 'em in the Small Debts Court; how am I to know ye ain't on that lay?'

'I can show you how if you'll carry a note from me on shore and leave it in the post-office. I'll guarantee a five-pound note is

sent to any address you name within twenty-four hours.'

'Ten-pun' note might do something,' answered the warder reflectively. 'The risk's a big 'un. If I'm nabbed I lose my berth straight off and stand a blessed good chance of being brought into one of these here fancy shops myself.'

'Why, who's to know?'

'Well,' replied the warder, looking round, 'it 'ud stun yer to count the spies that seem to be bred regular in a place like this, one man watching another for the reward. But I'll chance it, I will, the first time I go ashore. Now then, you Fifty-five, what are you making all that row for?'

The occupant of the next cell, Number Fifty-five, as he was in due sequence, had apparently gone mad. He raved and shrieked, cursed and yelled continuously. He banged at the door, which he could not well kick as they had taken away his boots. But ever and anon he amused himself with

wildly extravagant rhapsodies, as well as by devoting his gaolers to the infernal deities, as also the heads of any Church running counter to his sectarian prejudices. Then he was taken out, secured, and hauled before the chief officer for punishment. That autocrat ordered the sullen-visaged 'Vandemonian,' as the warders designated him, to undergo several days in the 'box' on bread and water. He was carried off, struggling and cursing, by main force, being crammed into the 'box' aforesaid. This retreat, which was inspected by Lance on another occasion, appeared to be a species of *oubliette*, apparently in the very keel of the vessel, so constructed that the delinquent could neither stand up, lie down, nor sit with ease. In addition to this rigorous confinement a gag was placed in the mouth of the offender if he refused to stop his unseemly outcry.

A few minutes before eleven o'clock Lance's door was unlocked, and he was summoned forth to take part in a new portion of the programme.

Being marched into the centre of the passage, he there saw a large iron cage, of which the door, just sufficiently large to admit one man, was opened. On either side stood an armed sentry with rifle at the *poise*.

An additional pair of warders was in attendance. The inmates of the cells, called by number, not by name, shuffled or stumbled out and made for the door of the cage, like tamed wild beasts under the keeper's whip.

It was a piteous, strangely-moving sight to a lover of his kind, had such been there. Men of various types and all ages obeyed the summons—the white-haired convict, reckless and hopeless, the larger half of whose life had been spent within prison walls, and who was now doomed to linger out the last years of a ruined life in places of confinement. The whole expression of the face denoted the human wreck which the *forçat* had become. The evil eye, furtive yet ferocious, the animal mouth and jaw, the shaven, sallow cheek—every faculty once capable of rising to the loftier attributes

of manhood seemed obliterated—the residuum but approached the type of the simian anthropoid—bestial, savage, obscene.

'Great God!' thought Lance, as one by one the felons passed into this cage, some young and hardly developed into fullest manhood like himself, some of middle age, some stunted and decrepit, bowed and misshapen from constant confinement and the weight of their irons, yet all with the same criminal impress upon form and feature,—'Great God! shall I ever become like these men? And yet once I had as little fear of becoming *what I am*——'

He passed in last, the door was shut, the cage commenced to ascend. His companions grinned and chuckled as, with a brutal oath, the older convict asked what he was sent on board for.

Lance hesitated for a moment, and then, reflecting that if he attempted to show what his companions in misery might consider airs of superiority they would find some way of

revenging themselves, answered in as careless a manner as he could assume—

'Well, I knocked over the head warder at Ballarat.'

'Good boy! What for?'

'He had been "running" me—wanted to make me break out, I suppose. I couldn't stand it any longer and went for him.'

'Why didn't yer choke the —— wretch?'

'Because I hadn't time.' Here the savage joy which he experienced when his enemy lay gasping beneath him came with a rush of recollection, and the old fire, so long absent, glowed lurid in his eyes. 'Another second or two and Bracker would have been a dead man.'

'Bracker, was it?' said one of the younger convicts. 'I was under him at Pentridge, and a —— dog he was! He tormented a cove there till he hanged himself. I'm dashed glad he copped it, anyhow.'

'You're a right un, anyhow,' said the older convict approvingly. 'It wants a chap like you now and then to straighten them infernal

wretches that think a man's like a log of wood as you chop and chip at till it's all done. I learned one of 'em different on the other side, and there's one or two here as'll get a surprise yet if they don't look out.'

At this stage of the conversation the slowly-ascending contrivance reached the upper deck, and the inmates became as stolidly silent as Eastern mutes.

One by one, covered by the rifles of the deck guards, they stepped out and followed each other in the shuffling walk peculiar to heavily-ironed men along and around the deck. Each man was a certain distance behind the one immediately preceding him. The foremost man walked to the bow of the vessel. When reached, he turned stiffly round as if by machinery, and resumed the same monotonous tramp in the opposite direction.

Melancholy treadmill and mockery of locomotion as was this parade, still it was not wholly without its attractions. The vision arose before their aching eyes of the blue sky,

the dancing wave, the far-off purple mountain. There drove seaward an outgoing steamer. Alas, alas! what a world of vain regrets did she evoke in Lance's mind! There were white-winged gulls, yachts and skiffs that resembled them in free and graceful flight. All these constituted a pageant impossible of production within prison walls. Then the ocean breeze, with every inspiration after the fœtid atmosphere of the lower deck, revived and in a sense exhilarated them. These joys and glories of the sea could not be shut out even from the gaze of the fettered captives, unless the further refinement of punishment of blindfolding had been added. And even in the *President* none of the officials had hit upon this deterrent device.

So by the time that Lance and his fellows had completed their allotted tramp, at the end of which time he was fatigued, unused as he was to lift his legs with such an encumbering weight, he felt, somewhat to his surprise, that his general tone had been raised.

He saw the shore, then known as Liardet's Beach, which did not seem so great a distance away. He could imagine in the night, when a dense fog enveloped the mud flats of the bay, the low sandy beach, the thickets of the tall ti-tree (*melaleuca*), that either by swimming or with friendly aid a prisoner might cross the intervening stretch of mud flat, so dreary and darksome at low water, and, disappearing into the thickets, be as little likely to be again seen as a ghost flitting at cock-crow.

During the remainder of this day Lance was sensible of an unusual feeling of exaltation, so much so that when night came,—the dreary night commencing so early and ending so late, when sleep would have been the most precious of boons,—he was wholly unable to compose himself to rest, as the phrase in orthodox fiction runs: Compose himself!—irony of ironies!—with the murmur of the prison herd in his ears, in which ever and anon a maniacal shriek shrilled through the murky midnight air.

The waves plashed and the rising gale moaned as if in natural protest against the foul cargo of crime, misery, and despair amid which he lay.

In the strange half-delirious fancies which coursed through his brain, he saw, plainly as it seemed to him, the face of the God-forsaken, desperate criminal who had last occupied this very cell. He saw him sitting crouched, hour after hour, day after day, in the very place where he sat. He marked the spot where his boot-heels had worn the solid plank. He saw him taken out to punishment. He saw him return more dogged, hopeless, and defiant than before. Lastly, he could see him apparently standing upright, but in reality suspended by the twisted woollen cord, his blanket torn into strips, gone to carry his case into that ultimate court of appeal where the wrongs of earth shall be righted by the justice of Heaven.

. . . . .

From this time Lance Trevanion ex-

perienced a complete change of sensation. 'Cabined, cribbed, confined' as he was most literally, there seemed to have been breathed into his soul with the salt scent of the ocean that which no art of man could shut out—the hope of freedom, the promise of escape. Moreover, a brief note had reached the address agreed upon between him and Tessie, and the warder, finding it transmutable into sovereigns, had formed a different opinion of Number Fifty-six. He began to look upon him as a victim of oppression, as something out of the run of the ordinary 'crew' of the *President*; finally as a young man who was worth taking a little trouble about, and for whom it might in the end be worth encountering even the serious risk of dismissal. After all, if made worth his while, what did dismissal from the Government service amount to? It involved no moral stigma, no personal disadvantage. If he cleared out with cash enough to set up a public-house, or even a store, at some of these new goldfields which

were 'breaking out' every day, how could he do better?

Having established friendly relations with his immediate attendant, Lance soon proceeded to reap the benefit of confidential intercourse. Articles of food, 'medical comforts'—luxuries, even—were smuggled in to Number Fifty-six. With the aid of these and recovered appetite, born of the sea air, and the tonic ideas which now pervaded his system, Lance improved measurably. He was reported to the chief officer for good conduct, and that dread official was pleased to address him one day, and, remarking upon his behaviour, to inform him that he would be transferred to the hulk *Success* at the end of three months, being much earlier than, from the grave nature of his offence, he might have calculated upon. Lance touched his cap, smiling bitterly as he shuffled off on his mechanical round with the faint rattle which his chains *would* make, however carefully he might be-wrap and bandage them.

At the end of three months! Well, the first week was over. It had seemed a month, and there were eleven more to follow before the penal period would be completed. In Heaven's name, what was he to do until then, hour after hour in solitude? But one little hour on deck, again to feel the free ocean breeze, to note the curling waves, the gliding sea-bird. Sometimes, indeed, even this faint solace was debarred. When the weather was rough and the hulk unsteady at her moorings, the hour's exercise, that precious respite, was forbidden. It was too difficult to haul up the cage, to supervise satisfactorily the deck occupants. So the dark dull day was fated to end in gloom and sadness as it had commenced. Sometimes, indeed, the second day passed over without the blessed interval. Not until the bad weather came to an end were the ill-fated captives permitted the scanty dole of fresh air and sunshine.

As much of Lance's leisure time while at

exercise as he could devote to this sort of reconnoitring he managed to concentrate on the mud flats, which at low tide were hardly a mile distant. These he carefully examined. He learnt by heart their bearings from the shore; satisfied himself that once there he could manage for himself. Of course there was the reverse side of the shield. The hulks—more especially the *President*, as holding a sample of the worst and most desperate criminals of the whole prison population — were most closely watched. No boats but those of the water police were permitted to come within an area marked by buoys, more than half a mile square. Was it worth while to run the risk of being caught and run down by these, or would it be more prudent to await his transfer to the *Success* and take the chance of escaping from the quarries?

The latter idea seemed feasible. Amid a regiment of convicts nearly a thousand strong, who worked from 7 A.M. to 5 P.M. in the

quarries, at the piers, or the building of a lighthouse — surely amid such an army of labourers some opportunity of escape would be afforded him.

Meanwhile, in spite of adverse circumstances, matters were decidedly improving. His friendly gaoler showed him how he could keep his port-hole open in fine weather, even after locking-up time for the night, and by other concessions materially lightened for him the weary hours.

More than once too had he received a letter from Tessie, carefully written on the smallest possible scrap of paper, but with its few words of priceless value and comfort to the captive. In the last one a distinct plan of escape was devised.

At this time, among the various pursuits and avocations by means of which men of gentle nurture who had been unsuccessful at the goldfields procured a living while leading an independent life, that of wild-fowling ranked high. Game of all sorts was readily saleable

at fabulous prices to the hotel and restaurant keepers of Melbourne. Every day scores of men, with pockets stuffed with bank notes, came to the metropolis eager to embark for England with what seemed a fortune to them, or to enjoy a season of revelry preparatory to returning to Ballarat or Bendigo. There was, as the miner's phrase then went, 'plenty more where that came from.' With such free-handed customers a *recherché* dinner, with fish, game, and fruit, preceding a theatre party, was indispensable. The cost was not counted. Bills were despised in those days when every river in favoured districts was a Pactolus. Hotel-keepers and tradesfolk were reproached for their meanness in not swelling their totals to a respectable sum. The free-handed miner, whose drafts, payable in the rich red gold Dame Nature was so proud to honour, mocked at expense, and exacted profusion at his quasi-luxurious banquets. Such being the state of affairs, with teal and widgeon at ten shillings a brace,

and black duck at a sovereign the pair, a reduced gentleman, with a punt and duck gun, was enabled to lead a philosophical, remunerative, and far from laborious existence.

CHAPTER XVI

It came at last—the week—the day—the very night to which Lance had looked forward with such nervous anxiety. When compelled to pace the deck for the last morning, as he trusted, with his chained comrades, he barely concealed his exultation at the thought that on the morrow he might be a free man once more. He feared it would be visible in his countenance, in his very step, which in spite of himself was almost elastic, causing his chains to clank unusually. Indeed one of his fellows in adversity noticed it.

Keen to detect the slightest change from the stereotyped prison bearing, he growled out, 'What the —— are ye at, step-dancing with your bloomin' irons, ye —— fool?

They'll clap the fourteen-pound clinks on ye if ye try the shakin' lay. Stoush it, ye ——'

The words were perhaps unfit for publication, but the intention was not all unkind. The trained *forçat* had quickly divined that something not in the programme—an 'extra,' so to speak—was likely to be played, and thus warned him against premature elation.

Lance felt his heart stop as the possibility occurred to him that the caprice of a warder might order him to wear irons weighing a quarter of a hundredweight in place of the comparatively light ones which at present confined his limbs. He at once 'dropped,' as the adviser would have phrased it, and falling into the chain-gang shuffle as if instinctively, said, 'All right, Scotty, this foggy day makes a fellow want to warm his feet.'

'Warm your feet!' scoffed the convict, 'you'll be lucky if you can raise a trot without hobbles these years to come. When your time's up they'll have ye for something else, like they did me. Once they've got a cove

on these —— hell-boats they don't like to let him go again.'

'How long have you been lagged, Scotty?' inquired Lance, less indeed impelled by curiosity than desirous of turning the conversation from what he felt was a dangerous direction.

'Me?' growled the convict hoarsely, glaring for a moment at Lance with his wolfish eyes—eyes which rarely met those of another steadfastly. 'I did ten stretch on the Derwent afore I come across the Straits — ten long years. That warn't enough for 'em, for I hadn't been a year at Bendigo when I was "lumbered" for robbing a cove's tent as I'd never been nigh. No! God strike me dead if I had! I knew the chap as did the "touch" as well as I know you. He and Black Douglas did it between 'em. But I'd a bad name. I'd come from the other side, and I was picked upon. I was seen going towards the tent the night before. The chaps that lost their gold swore to me; they wanted

to "cop" somebody. And there was I, as was going straight and had a good claim and didn't need to rob nobody, and thought I had a chance in a new country, there was I—"lagged" and dragged aboard again, and me no more in it than a sucking child. I went *mad* pretty well, and here's the end of it. But by ——' and here the half-insane felon swore a terrible oath, 'I'll give 'em something to talk about afore I'm done, and it'll be true this time—true as death—death—death!'

Here the unfortunate creature, whose features had gradually assumed an expression of ungovernable rage, lashed to fury by the thought of real or fancied injustice, raised his voice to a shriek like the cry of a wild beast, and with every feature working like those of an epileptic, fell on the floor of the deck helpless and insensible.

'What's all this?' demanded a warder, marching to the spot, yet cautiously, as always doubtful of a rush among the fierce animals over which he and his comrades ruled.

'Dash it all, you fellows are like a lot of old women—jabber, jabber. I shall have to put some of you in the black hole if you don't look out.'

'It's only Scotty, sir,' answered a crafty-looking convict who had been looking on, with a strange mysterious smile. 'He's got a fit or somethink. He's always mad when he gets on that Bendigo yarn of his.'

'Oh, Scotty, is it?' replied the warder carelessly. 'Throw a bucket of salt water over him; he'll come to directly. Your hour's up all but five minutes, men. You can go below and keep quiet, or it'll be worse for some of you.'

So below they went, in tens and tens, one after the other, murmuring and cursing among themselves, devoting Scotty, Lance, and the warder to the least respectable deities, yet not daring to raise their voices lest the dreaded 'black hole' or the more terrible 'box' should be apportioned to some of them with indiscriminate severity.

Lance, perhaps, was the only one who re-

tired to his cell with a feeling of satisfaction. Gloomy was the evening, dark yet not stormy. Brooding over all things hung an enshrouding, clinging fog. The lights of the vessels in the bay were invisible until the boats almost ran against their sides, then they appeared like blurred and wavering moons. The invisible flocks of sea-birds flying landwards, true precursors of a storm, wailed and shrieked in curiously weird cadence, like the ghosts of shipwrecked mariners. Yet no breath of rising wind or gathering tempest stirred the black waveless plain which stretched for so many a mile seaward and lay illimitable between the murky shores. To those long versed in sea signs—and there were many such on board this mockery of a ship—a storm was imminent. Phantom-like, motionless, lay the *President* on the oily moveless deep, a corpse-like hull upon the lifeless water. In that hour she seemed a derelict of that dread fleet which the poet dreamed of in his weirdest, grandest poem :

'And ships were drifting with the dead
To shores where all were dumb.'

. . . . .

If there was a period of comparative rest and peace in that lazar ship, choked to the gunwales with human nature's foulest disorders, it was between the second and third hour after midnight. Before that time there was little or no repose, much less silence. The restless felons, debarred from work or exercise, were loath to sleep or to permit such indulgence to others. But from about an hour after midnight to the lingering winter dawn a certain, or rather uncertain, quantity of sleep was procured. Not incorrectly may it be said that then in all abodes of sin and wretchedness

'The wicked cease from troubling
And the weary are at rest.'

The hush of nature, the strange compulsion of the tangible darkness and solemn stillness of the night, was unbroken save by the flights of sea-fowl and the occasional

sound from the shore, when softly yet distinctly touching the very stern of the vessel a grating sound was heard by Lance, secreted in an old state-room. Two large-sized ports, through which a man could easily crawl and drop himself into the water or on a boat below, were open. 'Lower away,' said a carefully modulated voice, 'and look sharp.'

As he spoke a stout rope was let down, of which the man in the boat-punt laid hold. Lance leaned out through the wide port of the state-room and could just distinguish the outline of a small boat. 'Drop slowly down,' said the strange voice; 'gently does it.'

The captive had by this time seated himself on the window-sill with his legs outward. His irons were wrapped and muffled with portions of his blanket, which he had sacrificed for the purpose. A twisted rope was made of strips of the same material, a stout gray woollen, woven and milled in Pentridge, and therefore free from shoddy and mixture.

Adown this Lance cautiously lowered him-

self—how cautiously and anxiously! A slip —a touch of foot on the side instead of the centre of the frail bark, and failure—recapture even—were imminent. The splash would at once alarm the vigilant ears of the sentries, whose rifle-bullets would be spurting in and about the spot in no time. Inch by inch he lowered himself until he felt a man's hand touch and steady him. His feet were on the flat bottom of a ducking canoe which floated low on the surface of the stirless deep. Lower still and lower he sank down until he found himself sitting on the floor of the punt with an arm on either thwart and his back nearly touching the stern. With one strong noiseless stroke the strange boatman sent his light craft yards away from the prison-ship, and as the hull vanished abruptly, swallowed up in the Egyptian darkness of the night, Lance felt a great throb at his heart. He inhaled joyously the salt odour of the tide, for he knew that, bar accidents, he was again a free man.

'Steady,' said the boatman in a low but distinct voice as he settled to his sculls, 'another quarter of a mile and we may talk as much as you please. We shall make the shore before yon black cloud bursts, and after that no boat leaves any ship in the bay till sunrise.'

Lance sat carefully still, and indeed had little inclination to talk for a while. Swiftly, smoothly, they seemed to speed through the ebon darkness lit up from time to time by the phosphorescent scintillations which fell from the black water at each dip of the oars.

'How do you steer?' he said at length. 'It wouldn't do to get lost in this fog; we might easily be picked up, and then my fate would be worse than before.'

'See that light?' said the rower, pointing to a tiny speck like a beacon, miles away on the main.

'I do see a very small glimmering,' said Lance; 'are you sure that is the right direction?'

'That light,' said the stranger slowly, 'is a fire in a nail can which is kept alight by my mate. It stands before our hut in Fisherman's Bend, and there could not be a better place to land.'

'How so?'

'Because it is cut off before and behind by marshes. There is no track to Liardet's Beach, which is only half a mile off. There is a mud flat in front, and hardly any one but ourselves knows the channel. It's dead low water now; any boat, even if they chased us, would be stuck in the mud in ten minutes, and it isn't every one that knows how to get off again.'

'Then we're right, and I'm a free man once more. Great God of Heaven! what a feeling it is. May I ask your name, the name of a man that's saved my life?'

'My name's Wheeler. Not that it matters much, unless I'm had up for being so soft-hearted as to mix myself up with the law's victims. But one gentleman takes a fancy

to help another now and then in this topsy-turvy country. I've heard and can see for myself that you're one.'

'I *was*,' groaned out Lance. 'People called me one. Shall I ever be one again?'

Here his irons, stirred with an involuntary movement, made a slight sound.

'That is the answer. My God, what had I done that I should be tortured thus?' His head sank down upon his knees, and he made no sound or sign till the boat glided up to the verge of the small beacon light and a second man appeared out of the darkness, taking hold of the painter which was thrown out to him.

'Haul her up, Joe, as far as you can,' said the boatman, stepping out on the low sedgy bank, so low as to be barely distinguishable above the water. 'Stop, I'll help you. Sit quiet then till we come to you.'

The shallow canoe, with the prow released from weight and tilted up, was pulled bodily on to the land. Then the men stood on either side of Lance, and, raising him from his

cramped position, helped him to step on to *terra firma*, and thence into the door of a small hut, in front of which stood the nail can aforesaid.

The hut was small, but weather-tight and snug as to its interior fittings, displaying the extreme neatness coupled with economy of space often observable where men live by themselves, especially if one of the celibates happens to have been a sailor.

'This is my mate, Trevanion,' said the first mariner. 'His name's Joe Collins, formerly second lieutenant of Her Majesty's ship *Avenger*. My name you know, so we needn't stand on ceremony with one another. We are well posted up in your story, thanks to your plucky pretty friend, so there's no need for explanation. You and I are ready for supper, I suspect, so we'll turn to while Collins sees to the canoe and makes all tight for the night. There's the first storm note; it's going to blow great guns before long, just as I thought it would.'

Mr. Wheeler rattled on in a cheery, careless sort of way, while his friend went in and out, fed the dogs, of which they had two or three couples—retrievers, terriers, and one of the tall handsome greyhounds, the kangaroo dog of the colonists. Lance knew that the talkativeness was assumed for the sake of putting him at his ease. Too strange and excited to converse himself, he could but sit in a rude but substantial chair, fashioned out of a beer-barrel and covered with a kangaroo skin, and look silently from one to the other.

Meanwhile the tea was made, the corned beef and bread set forth in a tin dish, pannikins placed ready, and the substantial bush meal, always fully adequate to the needs of a healthy man in good training, was ready. Before commencing, however, Mr. Wheeler fished forth from a species of locker a square bottle, apparently containing Hollands. From this he poured into each pannikin a pretty stiff 'second mate's glass.'

'Do us no harm this cold night,' he said.

'Your health, Trevanion, and a good journey to follow a bad start. It often happens here, take my word for it.'

The three men raised the tin pints and looked at each other. 'Thank you; from my heart I thank you,' Lance gasped out. 'God bless you both, if my wishing it will do you any good. I shall never forget this night.'

' One is far from recommending, or indeed palliating, the continuous use of alcohol, but there is no evading the fact that when people are more or less exhausted, beside being chilled and dispirited, a glass of spirits, be it sound cognac, 'the real M'Kay,' or, as in this instance, good square gin, produces an effect little less than magical. There are those who, in the joyous season of early youth, or fixed in the higher wisdom of abstinence, require it not. But strictly in moderation and under exceptional circumstances it is a medicine, a luxury, an *elixir vitae.*

No sooner had the powerful cordial commenced to produce its ordinary effect than the

heart of the ransomed captive was conscious of a feeling of lightness to which it had long been a stranger. Hope, timidly approaching, whispered a soothing message; a vision of distant lands and brighter days assumed form and colour. The cramped limbs recovered warmth; the sluggish blood commenced a quicker circulation. He found appetite for the simple meal, and listened with interest and amusement to the tales of moving incidents by flood and field with which, between their pipes, the woodsmen beguiled the winter evening. Lastly, the door was bolted, the dogs let loose, and Lance was invited to avail himself of a comfortable shake-down, where opossum cloaks and wallaby rugs protected him from the searching night air, now keen-edged with the fury of a howling storm. The wearied fugitive slept soundly, as he had not done for months. He awakened to find that the sun had risen and that his hosts had left him to complete his slumbers undisturbed by their exit.

His feelings when he arose and looked around were instinctively tinged with apprehension. By this time at least his escape had been made known. What excitement must have been caused! What despatches to the other prison-ships and their guards! To the water police! To the hunters of men on land and sea whose beards had been mocked at! Their energy would be further stimulated by the offer of a reward, as well as by the certainty of promotion in the event of recapture. As the captive sat up on his couch and looked through the open door upon the still waters of the river-mouth, from which the fog, now that the storm had blown itself out, was slowly lifting, he felt a shudder thrill through his frame as he realised how near he was still to his prison home, how helpless too, manacled as he was. He struggled to his feet, however, with a renewal of hope and confidence in the future. The fresh and unpolluted air acted like a cordial as he breathed it with long gasps of enjoyment. The close

walls of lofty ti-tree which shut in on three sides the nook of land, indistinguishable from the water until at close quarters, provided at once a shelter and a hiding-place almost impossible of surprise. The wild-fowl swam and dived and splashed and squatted, heedless of their chief enemy man. He found himself reverting in thought to the sports of his youth, to the happy days when, gun in hand, he would have joyed to have crawled within range of the shy birds and rattled in a right and left shot.

One of his irons clanked; the rag had slipped. How the sound brought him back to the present! His lips had shaped themselves into a curse, his brow had darkened, when his hosts suddenly appeared, emerging from a creek which wound sinuously through the marshy level. Fastening up the invaluable punt, they stepped lightly out, bearing with them a goodly assortment of wild-fowl —noble black duck, delicate teal, and that lovely minute goose, the *Anas boscha*, commonly known as the 'wood duck.'

'Grand bird this,' said Wheeler, throwing down a magnificent specimen of that finest of all the family—the 'mountain duck'—with his bronzed-fawn and metallic plumage. 'Splendid fellow to look at, but that's all. Pity, isn't it? Not worth a button to eat. Why do we shoot them? you'll ask. We sell them to the bird-stuffers. They pay well at the price they give us. Now then, we'll proceed to business, which means breakfast. Spatch duck—a couple of teal, eh? How do we do it? Pop 'em into boiling water. Feathers off in a jiffy. Cut them in four, broil, and serve hot. Tender as butter, these flappers, for they're not much older. After breakfast we'll unfold the plot. Slept well? I thought so. Hope you've got an appetite.'

Lance was well aware that Mr. Wheeler's cheery, garrulous tone, not by any means characteristic of men who live lonely lives, was assumed for the purpose of concealing his real feelings and saving those of his guest. But he appeared to take no heed, merely per-

forming his toilet with the aid of a bucket of water and a rough towel, and treating himself to a more thorough lavation than had been lately possible. Mr. Collins, R.N., had been setting-to with a will as caterer, and in far less time than one would think, a meal, in some respects not to be disdained by an epicure, appeared on the small table which, fixed upon trestles, was placed before the hut door.

'Try this teal, Trevanion; it's as plump as a partridge. Here's cayenne pepper; lemons in that net. Cut one in half and squeeze — "squeeze doughtily," as Dugald Dalgetty advises Ranald M'Eagh to do when he has his hand on the Duke of Argyle's windpipe, in the event of His Grace attempting to give the alarm. I read *A Legend of Montrose* over again last week. What a glorious old fellow Sir Walter is, to be sure! When you've finished your first beaker of tea, there's more in the camp-kettle, Australice "billy." Did I ever think—or you either,

Trevanion—that we should drink tea out of a "billy," or be our own cooks, housemaids, washerwomen, and gamekeepers all in one. Still, there are worse places than Australia, and that I'll live and die on.'

While Wheeler's tongue was going at this brisk rate, it is not to be supposed that his jaws were idle. The friends played a real good knife and fork, and Lance, between invitation and the natural temptation of, in its way, a dainty and appetising meal, followed suit. The other man gave a lively sketch of their morning's sport, and by the time breakfast was finished and pipes lighted, a well-worn briar-root having been made over to Lance on the previous evening, the gnawing feeling of consuming anxiety commenced to be somewhat allayed.

'Now we open the council of war,' began Wheeler, after two or three solemn puffs. 'Collins and I have to make a little *détour* on business which will occupy us till mid-day. Half an hour after we leave, a mysterious

artificer will suddenly appear, not out of the ground, like Wayland Smith in *Kenilworth* (pray excuse any excessive quotation of Sir Walter, but the fact is we got a second-hand edition cheap last month, and have been feasting upon him ever since). Well, this lineal descendant of Tubal Cain will arise out of the ti-tree and will disembarrass you of, say, any garniture which you may consider inconvenient to travel with. I don't know him; you don't know him; he don't know us; nobody knows anybody. You apprehend? But *the work will be done.* Afterwards look in that bag and you will find a rig-out, half-worn but serviceable, and somewhere about your measure.'

'Stop a minute — just permit me one minute,' proceeded Wheeler hurriedly, but ever courteously. 'A trifle more explanation is necessary. Here is your route arranged for you by your good angel, your admirable friend and protectress, with whom Collins and I are madly enamoured—but this by the way.

Listen again. When you feel ready for the road, take this left-hand path through the ti-tree. You see it starting behind that bush. You cannot get off it once you are on it. Follow it for three miles. You will meet there, by a reedy lagoon, a man with two horses. Mount the one which he leads, asking no questions. He will say "Number Six?" you will say "Polwarth." Of course you are the Mr. Polwarth of Number Six on a tour of inspection. He will ride with you the whole night through, stopping only at necessary intervals. At daylight you will find yourself more than fifty miles on the Gippsland road. He will take you by "cuts" and by-tracks to a part of Gippsland from which you may make your way to Monaro, to Twofold Bay, to Omeo—all A1 places for a man who wishes rest and seclusion for a season. You will take your choice. On the led horse—a good one, as I am informed—you will find valise, waterproof, and other necessaries. Here is a pocket-book, which I am

commissioned to hand to you, in which are £50 in notes and gold, besides a letter from her to whom you owe so much.'

Mr. Wheeler rattled out this full and complete code of instructions with his customary rapidity, finishing off with the delivery of the pocket-book to Lance, who held out his hand mechanically and stood staring at him for a few moments like a man in a dream.

Then he found his tongue.

'You have done for me that which many a man's brother would have declined. I am a poor creature now, and can't speak even as once I could. But may Heaven help you in your need, as you have stood by me. Some day it may be. I cannot say, but the day may come when a scion of the house of Wychwood may repay some slight portion of the debt of gratitude its most ill-fated son has incurred. Farewell, and God for ever bless you.'

The men looked in each other's eyes for a little space, one strong hand-clasp, after the

manner of Englishmen, was exchanged, and they parted.

'That's a man of birth and breeding who has been wrongfully convicted, I'll stake my life,' said Wheeler to his friend, as, with gun on shoulder and long steady stride, they left the hut behind them. 'Had I not been convinced of it, all Ballarat would not have tempted me to go into the affair. But between pity and admiration for that trump of a girl, I gave way. I wonder whether his luck will turn now and all come right.'

'There's a great deal in luck in this world,' said Mr. Collins sententiously. 'It's hard to say.'

Within a few minutes after the time specified, and for which Lance waited with ever-increasing impatience, a quietly-dressed individual so suddenly appeared as to startle him. He came around the side of the hut while Lance was deep in the perusal of Tessie's letter, which also contained a few lines from Mr. Stirling, telling him that his order for

cash, worded in a certain way, would always be paid to any person whom he might name at any place.

He looked up for an instant and saw the broad frame and steady eye of the stranger confronting him. 'Could this be a detective in plain clothes? The thought was madness.'

The stranger smiled. 'All right,' he said; 'I'm the blacksmith; come to take the clinks off—not the first job of the sort I've done. Sharp's the word—sit down, sir.'

Here the stranger produced from his pockets and a bag an assortment of tools of various sorts, including files of marvellous finish and temper. Seating himself, Lance freely yielded his limbs to the man of iron, who, in something under half an hour, produced remarkable results. How the heart of Lance Trevanion swelled with joy when he saw the hated manacles drop heavily upon the rug on which he had been sitting!

'So far so good,' remarked the liberator artisan. 'One of 'em's chafed your ankle, but

you'll soon get over that. Ugly, ain't they? If you'll dress yourself while I take a walk along the river I'll show you what I'll do with them.'

A few minutes sufficed for the inspection of the beauties of the Yarra. When he returned, the good-looking young man with the clean-shaved face and short hair did not look in the least like the hunted convict of the previous day.

'My word,' quoth the smith, dragging out an old sugee bag, 'you look fust-rate—never see any one change more for the better—for the better. Here goes!' Thus speaking, he placed the irons in the bag, which he afterwards nearly filled with the prison clothing of which Lance, even to his boots, had denuded himself. These he took into the punt, and rowing to a deep place in the river near the bank he threw in the sack, which the weight of the irons caused to sink at once. 'Many a poor fellow's been buried like that at sea,' he remarked, in soliloquy. 'I wonder if it ain't

as good a way as any. The p'leece won't find them in a hurry, I bet. And now Mr. Never-Never, I'll show you the left-hand road, as I was told to. There's your track, and good luck to you.'

Lance had good reason to believe that this service had been paid for, but he could not bear that the man who had rendered him such material aid should go even temporarily unrewarded. So he extracted one of the five-pound notes from the pocket-book and presented it to him at the close of proceedings.

'You're a gentleman,' said the smith, unconsciously using the stereotyped expression of those receiving a gratuity in advance of expectation.

'I was once,' replied Lance, with a sadly humorous half-smile. 'God knows if I ever shall be one again.'

'No fear,' quoth the hammerman, with a cheery, consoling accent. 'You've got the world afore you now. Many a man in this country has been a deal lower down that

holds his head high enough now. Keep up your "pecker." It'll all come right in the end.'

On the narrow marshy track, which led between thick-growing walls of ti-tree eight or ten feet high, there was not, as Wheeler averred, much chance of losing the way. Lance plodded on cheerfully for about an hour. Once he could have done the distance in far less time, but from want of exercise and other reasons he had contracted the habit of taking short steps, which he found it difficult to change. He felt altogether out of sorts, and was by no means sorry to see near a deep reed-fringed lagoon a man who looked like a stock-rider sitting on a log watching two hobbled horses that, saddled and bridled, fed close by the water's edge.

As the foot traveller emerged from the ti-tree thicket, the man walked to the horses' heads, and, after one look at the newcomer, commenced to unloose the hobbles. These he buckled on to each saddle, and, tightening

the girths, said interrogatively, 'Number Six?'

'Polwarth,' was the answer returned.

Upon this he held the bridle of one of the horses and motioned for Lance to mount, after altering the stirrup to suit the stranger's length of limb. This done, he mounted and rode forward at a steady pace, turning neither to the right nor left, except when apparently some advantage would seem to be gained by it. Both horses walked fast, particularly the one which Lance bestrode, which he found to be good in all his paces, free, clever, and in all respects a superior style of hackney.

Mile after mile did they ride after this fashion, walking, trotting, or cantering as the roads, both deep and difficult in places, permitted. The rate at which they travelled was on the whole rapid, though the guide evidently husbanded the powers of both horses in view of a toilsome journey still to be made.

An hour before midnight, pursuing a by-track for some distance, they came upon a hut

in a forest near a deserted saw-pit. It had once been a snug and substantial dwelling, but the timber had long been cut and carted away, so the hut was no longer needed. The grass grew thick and green around. The guide, with practised hand, first lighted a fire in the large mud-lined chimney, and then unsaddled and hobbled out the horses. He produced from a rude cupboard bread and cold meat, tea, sugar, and the quart pot and pannikins necessary for a bush meal. These had evidently been placed there in anticipation of such a visit. Besides all this, there were a couple of rugs, and as many double blankets of the ordinary gray colour used by travelling bushmen.

The fire having burned well up, and a couple of dry back logs having been placed so as to ensure a steady glow for at least half the evening, his taciturn guide relaxed a little. 'Here we are for the night,' he said, 'though we'd best make an early start, and I don't know as we could be much more comfortable.

We've plenty to eat and drink and a fire to sleep by, no cattle to watch, and a good roof over us. I've often had a worse night along this very road.'

'I daresay,' said Lance, who began to shake off his fears of immediate capture. 'This must be a queer road in wet weather.'

'I believe yer,' answered the guide. 'Many a mob of fat cattle I've drove along this very track. It's a nice treat on a wet night, sitting on your horse soaking wet through, nearly pitch dark, and afraid to give the bullocks a chance for fear they'd rush. This here's a picnic in a manner of speaking.'

'I suppose it is,' quoth Lance. 'Things might be worse, I daresay. I shall sleep well, I don't doubt. I haven't been riding much lately. Where shall we get to-morrow night?'

'Somewhere about the Running Creek; it's a longish pull, but the horses are good and in fine buckle. You can do a long day's journey with an early start.'

Their meal over, the two men sat before the glowing fire on the rude seats which they had found in the hut. The soothing pipe helped still further to produce in Lance's case a calm and equable state of mind. To this succeeded a drowsily luxurious sensation of fatigue, which he did not attempt to combat, and, stretching himself on his rug, he covered himself with the blanket; he and his companion were soon asleep.

The stars were still in the sky when he started at a touch on the shoulder, and found that his companion had noiselessly arisen and prepared breakfast. The horses also, ready saddled and bridled, were standing with their bridles over the fork of a tree near the door. Lance was soon dressed. Breakfast over, they were in the saddle and away while as yet the first faint tinge of the dawn light had scarcely commenced to irradiate the mountain peaks which stood ranked like a company of Titans near the eastern sky-line.

With this, the second day's journey, a

change commenced to make itself apparent in Lance Trevanion's mien and bearing. The fresh forest air was in his lungs, the great woodland through which they were now riding commenced to endue him with the fearless spirit of the waste. He could hardly imagine that it was so short a time since he was in fettered bondage. What a difference was there in his every movement and sensations! He began unconsciously to act the free man in tone and manner. He praised the paces of the horse he was riding, and criticised that of his guide in a way which showed that experienced person that he was no novice in the noble science of horse-flesh. He began to draw out his companion. In him he perceived, as he thought, the ordinary bushman, an experienced stock-rider, or, perhaps, confidential drover, and thence he began to wonder how much of his past history he had been made acquainted with. A chance question supplied the information.

CHAPTER XVII

'WHERE are ye thinking of going, boss, when we get to Bairnsdale? Twofold Bay's a terrible long way off to go prospectin'. I'd a deal sooner chance Omeo. It's only twenty miles farther on.'

'Omeo, Omeo!' repeated Lance. 'Why should I go to Omeo?'

'Haven't ye heard? There's a big show struck close by the old township. They say they're leaving Ballarat, lots of 'em, to go there. It's the richest find yet, by all accounts; shallow ground too!'

'Omeo, Omeo!' Lance again repeated half unconsciously to himself. Had not Tessie made reference to it in the coach from Ballarat? Had she not said that Lawrence Trevenna

was there, the man to whose baleful shadow he owed ruin and dishonour, the ineradicable disgrace which would always be associated with his name! He had a heavy account to settle with him. When they met all scores would be cleared off. This much he had vowed to himself in the prison cell at Ballarat, in the hulk *President* in the silence of midnight, in that foetid hold of the prison-ship, where he could scarcely breathe the pollutted atmosphere, laden with crime, heavy with curses. There, in that time of horror and dread, again and again had he sworn to take his enemy's life—that one or other should die when next they met, be it where it might.

And then again, as he hoped to efface himself, to feel secure from the pursuit which he heard in every breeze and feared in every echoing hoof, where could he find so safe and unsuspected a refuge as this new district—wild, rough, isolated as Omeo must necessarily be! Far from civilisation of any kind, on a lone mountain plateau, snow-covered in

winter, only to be reached by paths so devious and precipitous that wheels could not be employed, where every pound of merchandise or machinery was fain to be carried on pack-horses. There could be no better place for a hunted man to disappear, to obliterate himself. There he could remain for the present,—unknown, invisible to all who had known the former Lance Trevanion,—until he matured his plans and could make his way to a foreign shore.

Here, as he recovered health and strength under the influence of the mountain breezes and the wild woodlands which lay so near the river-sources and the snow summits, it would be comparatively easy to transmit his share of the Number Six washings, still safe in the Joint-Stock Bank in the custody of Charlie Stirling. Here, once located and established as Dick, Tom, or Harry—surnames were in the nature of superfluities at goldfields of the class which Omeo was pretty sure to be—he could make arrangements for selling out to

Jack Polwarth. Quietly and without suspicion he could arrange to have the whole of his property transferred to him in cash, and some fine morning, under cover of a trip to Melbourne on business or pleasure, he would show Australia a clean pair of heels, and in America, North or South, in some far land where his name was never heard, would live out the rest of a life with such solace as he might, might even—when Time, the healer, should have dulled the heart-pangs which now throbbed and agonised so mordantly—might even reach some degree of contentment, if not of happiness.

And Estelle! Estelle! There was the sharpest sting—the bitterest grief—the direst pang of all. Could he ever look again into those lovely, trusting eyes, having undergone what he had done? Could he ask her—angel of purity that she was; the embodiment of the refinement of generations of stainless ancestors; sheltered, as she had been, by the conditions of her birth and education from all

knowledge of the evil that there is in the world,—could he ask her to lay her head upon a felon's breast?—to take his hand in life-long pledge of happiness, when at any time, in any land where this long arm of extradition could reach, the hand of justice might seize him? No! Such companionship, such love, could never be his in the future. He had lost them for ever. On the lower level to which he had sunk he must remain. To its privations he must accustom himself; the surroundings he must endure. There was no help for it. If Tessie Lawless chose to share his lot he might not deny her. She knew the whole of his story. She loved him. She had been faithful and true. She deserved any poor recompense, such as the damaged future of his life, that of a nameless man, could offer, if she chose to accept it. For Trevanion of Wychwood was dead, and his early love, with all his high hopes and noble aspirations, lay deep in the grave of his buried honour.

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From the day of Lance Trevanion's arrest at Balooka, no word, by letter or otherwise, had reached Wychwood of the fortunes of its heir. Days, weeks, months succeeded each other in the uneventful round into which country life in England has a tendency to settle when ordinary interests are withdrawn or unduly concentrated. It was pitiable to note the squire's anxiety when the Australian mail was due. For him, as for Estelle, there seemed to be but one man whose fortunes were worth following in the whole world—from whom letters were as the breath of life. And now these tidings from a far land, regular, if brief and sententious, up to this time, were suddenly withheld.

With the failing health of the squire—for he suffered from one of the mysterious class of complaints before which strong men go down like feeble children—passed away much of his fierce obstinacy, his pride and arrogance. He thought of his son as he had last seen him,—haughty, tameless, defiant,

with all his faults a true Trevanion,—and now, when he hoped to have seen him once again, grown and developed, though bronzed and possibly roughened by the rude life of a colony, when he had schooled himself to recall rash words and to make the *amende* as far as his nature would permit, here he was thwarted, bewildered, maddened by this sudden arrest of all knowledge of his fate.

'The boy has had the best of the fight,' he groaned out.

Ever at his side, at this crisis chief counsellor and consoler, Estelle here rose to her true position in the house. Awakened to the necessity of taking a leading part in the family fortunes, the added weight of responsibility appeared to nerve and mould her to a loftier resolve, to a more sublimely unselfish purpose. She it was who suggested to the desponding father every shade of excuse for the stoppage of the letters which were as the life-blood to his failing constitution. She it was who ransacked the newspapers for reports, meagre

as they mostly were, of the great Australian goldfields. She it was who looked up maps and authorities upon the colonies, until she even acquired the recondite knowledge, granted to so few Britons, that Victoria is not situated in New South Wales, nor Tasmania the capital of Western Australia.

Torn and rent as was her own heart when she allowed herself to think of her lover,—lost to her in the wilds of a far country, perishing in the wilderness for all she knew, exposed to dangers among savages and outlaws even more ruthless, — she yet braced up her courage. She nerved herself to bear the worst, if only she might soften the pain and anxiety which began increasingly to sap the strength of the failing head of the ancient house.

More than once had she interviewed the passengers in vessels returning from Melbourne, hungrily eager for any shred of news from Ballarat. Did they know a miner named Trevanion, or even Polwarth? How long was it since they had seen him, and what

were his present circumstances? But these inquiries were vain. Few of the returning adventurers had troubled themselves to remember the names of their chance acquaintances. Others indeed had heard of the untoward fate of the young Englishman, but thought it no kindness to tell his friends. They could not possibly aid him or alleviate his condition. Better to let the bad news unfold itself in due time.

So the weary days went on. Spring glided into summer. The ancient oaks and 'immemorial elms' of Wychwood Chase were clothed anew with tender greenery. The glad, brief life of the northern summer burst into joyous fulness, then paled and waned. Autumn, with slow pace but ruthless hand, despoiled the glades and strewed the forest aisles with withered leaves and fallen chaplets. Ere the blasts of winter had commenced to herald the doom of the dying year, it became generally known that the Squire of Wychwood was failing fast—would, indeed, hardly last over

the coming Christmastide. It was observed that he buried himself in his library, that he had given up all habitual modes of exercise. No guests were invited to the house, and Miss Estelle more often dined by herself than not in the great, lonely dining-room which had so often echoed with festive mirth, or, in older days, still rang with ruthless revelry.

As the squire's health declined his affections seemed to concentrate themselves upon his niece. She had in all respects borne herself as a daughter to him—had shown even more than a daughter's sympathy and constant, watchful care.

The younger son was at college. He would be the heir to Wychwood in case the adventurer on the far Australian goldfield never returned to claim his inheritance. Amiable, well conducted, of respectable ability and fair attainments, he had never (such is the perversity of the human heart) been a favourite of his father's. The stern old man—bitterly as he had quarrelled with the disobedient elder brother, whose

nature was in so many respects a reflex of his own, yet in his heart owned him for the higher nature—recognised in him the befitting heir to his ancient demesne, to the hall in which nobles had sat and princes feasted. Now to his gloomy and brooding soul all hope was lost. Some dire misfortune, even a fatal accident, had doubtless happened — must have occurred, indeed, or Lance's chronicle of his life and adventures, meagre as to detail, but of regular recurrence, would have continued. If only he could have set eyes on Lance before he died! Could he but have told him how he had regretted the rash words and bitter speech, the prayers he had prayed for his safe return; ay, the tears he had shed in the agony of his remorse—he, the proud, inexorable Trevanion of Wychwood! It was well-nigh incredible. None of his old-time comrades and fellow-roysterers could have believed it of the Dark Squire, as the villagers then named him, with lowered tones and bated breath. But in the days of sorrow and failing strength,—when the strong man is brought

low; when those hours, so long approaching, so long menacing, *have* come; when death seems no longer a strange visitant but a familiar friend, more welcome in truth than the sad alternation of sorrow and unrest,—the haughtiest pride of man is lowered. In those hours of lonely grief and dark despair many a recantation is made—many a vow recorded undreamed of in life's festal season.

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The death-day came at last. He lingered on past the season fixed by general expectancy; but ere the first bud of the swelling leaflet had been set free by the breath of spring in his ancestral glades, the squire lay with his warrior forefathers in the historic vault, which had not been opened since the last Lady of Wychwood had been carried there, long ere her beauty had faded. The retainers of the house, and not a few of the notables of the county, assembled to pay the last form of respect to one whom, in despite of his latter-day life of seclusion, they recognised as one of the

born leaders of the land. As the long procession passed slowly along the winding road, which at one point skirted the sea-cliff, to the venerable chapel which had seen so many solemn ceremonies celebrated connected with the family, more than one inquiry was made for the absent heir, and uniform regret expressed that he should not have returned from the far south land to claim his own and assume his rights.

When the last sad duties had been paid to him whom, in spite of his stormy outbursts of temper, Estelle could not help holding in love and pity, a strong resolve appeared to actuate the once timid girl, shrinking, as carefully-nurtured women do, from independent action and strange surroundings. The estate would go, of course, to the heir-at-law, strictly entailed as it had been for many generations. But it had been in the old man's power to dispose as he pleased of the large amount accruing from the savings of late years, and from the sale of an estate which was not

included in the entail. This bequest, which had been made while the testator was of perfectly sound mind and body, was of such amount as to render Estelle perfectly independent for the rest of her life; indeed, to exalt her somewhat to the position of an heiress.

In the long conversations held in his latter days of decadence between the squire and his niece, it had been definitely agreed that Estelle should proceed to Australia and there seek out the errant heir—should bring him back if possible by force of entreaty or persuasion to the land of his forefathers, to the rank and position handed down from the fierce warriors and splendid courtiers whose presentments frowned or smiled down upon their descendants in the old hall.

'I have such faith in you, my darling Estelle,' said the squire, in one of his later confidences, 'that I shall die more peacefully knowing that you will search this far country for my lost unhappy boy. You have sense

and courage in a degree rarely bestowed upon women. Your heart has been true to him during his long absence — this more than anxious period of doubt and dread. If he be in the neighbourhood of the place from which we last heard from him, you will be sure to gain some tidings of him. If you see him, your influence over him, powerful for good, always for good, as in the past, will save him, and once more the old ancient race, which has never yet failed of a male heir in the direct line, will be fittingly represented. If Lance, the son of whom I was so proud, returns no more from that far country, the estate will of course pass into the hands of his brother. But you are in any case *well* provided for. May God bless and reward you, my darling Estelle, for your forbearing kindness to a broken-spirited man. And now, kiss me, darling; I think I could sleep.'

He slept the sleep which knows no awakening on earth.

The parting words of her uncle had for Estelle almost the sacredness of a dying command. She had vowed, kneeling by his bedside, to leave no region unexplored, to carry through the search with the completeness which characterised all her proceedings. The high courage and resolute will which were hers by inheritance from the Trevanions stood her now in good stead. With an air of quiet resolve she arranged all her personal affairs without parade or hesitation; within a fortnight her passage had been taken, a few letters of introduction procured, also a very moderate outfit suitable for a young lady travelling, if not incognito, in a very unobtrusive way. And at the appointed day and hour Estelle found herself speeding away over the waters blue in company with a stranger crowd of enforced acquaintances, borne over an unknown sea on a wild and desperate quest. Before her, in imagination, she pictured the rude solitudes of an unknown

land — even the fancied perils of a lawless goldfield.

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The low coast of the island-continent line, irregular and faint, appearing from out the southern sky, so long unbroken. A new land —a new city. Melbourne at last! The land how strange! The city how new! The people how foreign-appearing and *bizarre* to the voyager from the region of tradition and settled form. Estelle looked and moved like a strayed princess amid a horde of nomads. She had schooled herself into the belief that in her quest she would be called upon to suffer all kinds of privations, and to mingle with every variety of 'rough colonists.' She resolved to make a trial essay. In pursuance of this heroic resolution she preferred to go to an hotel upon her own responsibility, before delivering the letters of introduction with which she had armed herself. She was not exactly fortunate in her choice, as indeed was to be expected. However, she was agree-

ably surprised at the civility with which she was treated, as well as by the absence of 'roughness,' as displayed by the *habitués*, many of whom were patently uneducated. Still Estelle made the discovery shortly, that even so recently constructed a city as Melbourne, in the fret of a gold-fever, was not essentially unlike an English town—that a handsome young woman was more or less an object of attraction and curiosity. Tolerably well veiled, doubtless; nevertheless an inquiring tone displayed itself unmistakably. And, in spite of her resolve to brave all the social inclemencies of her novel surroundings, Estelle Chaloner shrank from the implied doubtfulness to which her unprotected condition led up. Escape was easy. She smiled as she thought of her boasted independence; how soon it had failed her! Being a sensible girl, however, in the least restricted sense of the word, she capitulated forthwith, resolving to present one of the letters of introduction without delay.

Having packed up her belongings,—not too

extensive,—paid her bill, and arranged all things ready for departure, Estelle picked out a 'nice' looking letter, and resolved to abide the hazard of the die. The address was, 'Mrs. Vernon, Toorak, South Yarra, near Melbourne.' The aboriginal sounding names gave no information as to distance. 'Near' might mean two miles or twenty. A man's next-door neighbour in Australia was sometimes fifty miles distant, she had heard. Happily she bethought herself of asking information of the landlady of her hotel.

'Toorak, Toorak!' said that important personage. 'Oh yes; I know it well enough, and a nice place it is—all the swell people live there! Mrs. Vernon's place is one of the best there. A grand house, and everything in style. You'd better have a cab called; they'll take you there for ten shillings, luggage and all.'

'I may not be asked to stay,' replied Estelle diffidently, 'and if I am, I am not sure that I——'

'Oh yes you will,' interposed the hostess. 'Don't talk that way. Wait till you see what sort of a place it is. And Mrs. Vernon's a lady that won't let you go, I'll answer for it.'

A short half-hour's drive across Princes' Bridge, through or around the maze of Canvastown, past the Botanic Gardens, and along a newly made and recently metalled road, brought Estelle to a pair of massive ornate iron gates, on the northern side of the road leading along an avenue of some length.

'This is Charlton Lodge,' said the driver. 'Shall I drive to the front?'

'Certainly,' she replied, as she smiled at the question. The winding avenue was well gravelled, with a border of shaven grass, beyond which were beds filled with flowering shrubs, planted amid and underneath tall pines, with an admixture of elms, oaks, and Australian cedars. Everything exhibited careful tendance, demonstrating that although many of the best labourers had levanted to the goldfields there were still some few

servitors who preferred comfort to independence. Estelle was beginning to wonder how long the preliminary approach was to last, when a velvet-piled lawn came into view, around which the carriage-drive took a sweep, her charioteer halting underneath a spacious portico of classical proportion and finish.

The cabman rang the bell, and receiving assurance from a neatly dressed parlour-maid that her mistress was at home, returned to his seat and awaited events, while Estelle was duly ushered into a handsomely furnished drawing-room of unquestionable modernity of tone.

After a reasonably short interval, employed by Estelle in a comprehensive survey of the apartment, which, indeed, bore tokens of intelligent and appreciative taste, a well-dressed elderly lady appeared.

'Miss Chaloner!' she exclaimed. 'I am truly glad to see you at last. I have been wondering what had become of you. My dear friend, Mary Dacre, wrote to me to say that you

were coming out by the mail, and that you had kindly brought a letter to me. I heard of the vessel's arrival, and that you had left the vessel and gone to an hotel. I called at Scott's and Menzies's, but they had not heard of you.'

'I went to the Criterion,' said Estelle smilingly. 'I rather regretted it afterwards.'

'Of course you did, my dear, and permit me to say that it partly served you right. Why did you not come to me *at once*? Melbourne is such a queer place now since the diggings have broken out. There are all sorts of strange characters and curious people about. It is hardly a place for a young lady just now, unless under efficient chaperonage.'

Estelle gazed at the kindly old lady, whose eyes at that moment shone with maternal tenderness for an instant before she answered. Her voice softened as she said—

'You must remember, as no doubt Miss Dacre told you, that I came to Australia for a special purpose; and that if I expect to be

successful in my search I cannot afford to let small obstacles stand in my way.'

'Small obstacles! That is very well, but surely you don't intend to go up to the diggings and to horrid places in the bush all by yourself?'

'That is just what I *do* intend, my dear Mrs. Vernon,—neither more nor less. I have thought over the matter scores—yes, hundreds of times—and I can see no other way. If I merely wished to see the country I might arrange things differently. But I have one important, principal, all-absorbing purpose in view. It is my star. I fix my eye on that, and all other things, even those which appear to be insuperable difficulties, must give way.'

'Dangers and difficulties, traps and pitfalls, do all those count for nothing in your list of drawbacks?'

'I must use a man's argument. I see other women have done—are doing the same—why not I? Suppose I were a sempstress or a poor governess on her way to an engagement, should

I not have to do the same?—to travel unattended; to take my chance of rough or uncongenial companionship? Why am I so much more precious than other girls of my age, that I have to be fenced round with so many precautions?'

'All this is fine talking, my dear Miss Chaloner, and it's very nice of you to say so; but a young lady of position and fortune cannot—*must not*—travel about by herself as if she were a barmaid or a music-hall singer. There *is* a difference beside that of age and sex—and the disagreeables—you have no idea of the nature of them.'

'I don't know much about them, though I may partly guess, my dear Mrs. Vernon, but we Chaloners and Trevanions are said in Cornwall to be an obstinate race. My mind is made up. I must take a seat in the Ballarat coach for next Monday.'

'I am afraid you *are* an obstinate girl,' said Mrs. Vernon good-naturedly. 'Well, a wilful woman must, I suppose, have her own

way. I have relieved my mind, at any rate. Now the next thing is to see how we can help you in your perilous adventure. Let me think. Do I know any Ballarat people? No, but Mr. Vernon does; if not, his friends do, which comes to the same thing.'

'I hope that you won't take all this trouble about me,' said Estelle earnestly. 'I know how to get there, with my own unaided intelligence. You would be surprised how much I know about Port Phillip from books and newspapers.'

'And you are bent upon acquiring your own colonial experience? Well, my dear, it may be all for the best in the end; but if you were a daughter of mine I should not have one happy moment from the time I lost sight of you till you returned. Do *you* know any one at Ballarat, or have you letters to people there?'

'There is one gentleman there whom I seem to know quite well through my cousin's letters. He was never tired of praising him.

He spoke of him as his best friend. His name was Charles Stirling. He was a banker. Then there was a Mr. Hastings, and John Polwarth, Lance's partner,—both miners.'

'A banker and two miners! Chiefly young and unmarried, I suppose. And are these all your introductions in a strange town, and that town Ballarat, you dear innocent lamb that you are? Well, well; we have five days before us. Mr. Vernon will be home to dinner at seven, and we can have a council of war. Here comes afternoon tea, after which we go for a drive if you are not tired.'

'I am not in the least tired,' replied Estelle. 'And now that my departure is decided upon I am ready for anything.'

So the carriage was ordered out—a costly enough equipage in those days of unexampled enhancement of prices — the three-hundred-guinea pair of horses that consumed oats at twelve shillings a bushel and hay at seventy pounds a ton, driven by a coachman at three pounds a week. But Mr. Vernon was a mer-

chant who had made one fortune by the lucky cargoes of mining necessaries, and was fast making another by gold-buying. Such an additional item of expense as a carriage for his wife was the merest bagatelle.

So the ladies drove to St. Kilda for a breath of sea air, taking the Botanic Gardens on their way back, where there was a flower-show patronised by His Excellency, Mr. Latrobe, and all the rank and fashion of the metropolis, chiefly represented by a few squatters and club men, with a sprinkling of gold commissioners on leave.

Mrs. Vernon was not averse to the company of so distinctly aristocratic-looking a damsel as Estelle Chaloner, whose appearance, quietly dressed as she was, elicited, in that day of matrimonial competition and proportional scarcity of young ladies, endless admiring comment.

At dinner, for which they had barely time to dress, they were enlivened by the society of Mr. Vernon — a shrewd,

good-humoured mercantile personage—and a gentleman whom he introduced as Mr. Annesley and described as a Goldfields Commissioner. This last was a very good-looking and correctly dressed young man, not long from England. He was in Melbourne, on leave after twelve months' hard work on the diggings, according to his own account, and had some flavour of the high spirits and abounding cheerfulness of the naval officer on shore about him. His host 'drew' him judiciously about mining life and adventure, on which he was by no means loath to enlarge. He was evidently gratified by the intense interest with which Estelle listened to his amusing and justifiably egotistic rattle, and in the innocence of his heart essayed to complete her subjugation. But, to Estelle's intense regret, he did not come from Ballarat—'had been quartered in quite a different district.' She was deeply interested in him, however, as marking a type with which Lance must necessarily have often come into contact, and

she concluded an agreeable evening, widely different from her expectation of things Australian, with an assurance from Mr. Vernon that he would bring her a budget of definite information about Ballarat and its social condition on the morrow.

Had she been in a position to listen to the conversation of her host and his guest when she and Mrs. Vernon had retired for the night, and the gentlemen had adjourned to the smoking-room, she would have scarce slept so soundly.

'Lance Trevanion? of course I *had* heard of the beggar,' said the Commissioner, as he threw himself back in a settee and lighted one of Mr. Vernon's choice cigars. 'We had a fellow from Ballarat staying at the camp at Morrison's who had been at the trial and knew all about him. But how could I tell the poor thing? What a sweet girl she is, by the way! why, she'll have half Melbourne pursuing her with proposals if she only lets them see her. Don't know when I've seen such a girl since I left England. Why she should

bother her head about Trevanion now, I can't imagine.'

'Well, he's her cousin, my wife tells me, for one thing. They were engaged, it seems, too, before he left home. Sad pity that such a girl should spoil her chances here and throw herself away. But that's their nature, we all know. Tell us the tale, Annesley; I never heard.'

'As it was told to me, this was about it. This fellow Trevanion, a good-looking, well-set-up youngster, seems to have been a bad lot or a d—d fool, one can hardly say which. Anyhow, he was fond of play, and got mixed up with a crooked Sydney-side crowd. There was a girl in it, of course. They won from him, it was said. He, like a young fool, thought he might choose his own company at an Australian diggings, "all people out here being alike," or some such rot. The end of it was that he was run in for horse-stealing, or having a stolen horse in his possession. Got two years. I've heard since that he was the

wrong man, but the sergeant—queer card and deuced dangerous, that Dayrell—wanted a case—the diggers had lost so many horses that they wanted a conviction. So poor Trevanion had to pay for all.'

'What an infernal shame!' said Mr. Vernon. 'Couldn't anything be done for him?'

'Well (by Jove, this is a cigar, I must have another by and by), looks so, doesn't it? But it's necessary to be hard and sharp at the diggings or the country would go to the devil. Wrong man shopped now and then, like Tom Rattleton in California, but can't be helped. Ever hear that yarn? No! Well, I'll just light number two, and here goes: Tom, you must know, was a bit fastish before he left the paternal halls in another colony. After one of his escapades, a friend of the family, good fellow, observes one day, "Tom, it's no use talking, you'll come to be hanged." "Thank you," says Tom, "I think I'll try San Francisco; this place is too confined for a man of

my talents." Gold at Suttor's Mill had just been reported.'

'And did he go?'

'Like a bird, with lots of Australian "bloods," as they used to call them. Had to work their way back before the mast, most of them. Tom had, anyhow. After the fatted calf had been duly potted, friend of the family arrives.

'"Hulloa, Tom! home again? Proud to see you, my boy. Safe back to the old place, hey?"

'"That is so," answered Tom, putting on a little Yankee touch, "do you remember what you said to me as I was leaving?"

'"No, my boy, what was it?" Friend didn't like to own up, you see.

'"Well, you said I'd come to be hanged, and, by Jove! *I nearly was* in 'Frisco. *The rope was round my neck*, sure as you're there. Took me for a gambler who'd shot a man the night before. He turned up in time to be turned off, or I should have been—well, I *shouldn't* have been here to-day."

'Friend turned quite pale, grasped his hand, and sloped. Affecting, wasn't it?'

'Good story, very,' quoth the host. 'Like Tom Rattleton. Reckless young beggar he always was—but turned out well afterwards. *Experientia docet.* Near thing, though. Now, touching this poor girl's cousin. Nothing earthly will prevent her going to look for him.'

'H—m! Does she know any one in Ballarat?'

'Mr. Charles Stirling, a banker; Hastings and Polwarth, Trevanion's mates.'

'Charlie Stirling! I've heard of him. Awfully good sort, people say. Well, he'll do all he can. If she goes up he's the man to break it to her. Dalton's Sub-Commissioner there. I'll leave a line for him. Between them both they'll see no harm come to her. Well, Number Two rivals his predecessor. It's a fair thing, I suppose. Good-night.'

A couple of days were spent pleasantly enough in Melbourne. A few of the South Yarra notables dropped in, not quite accident-

ally, to Mrs. Vernon's afternoon tea, whose manner and appearance rather altered Estelle's preconceived notion of colonial society. They expressed the wildest astonishment at hearing that she was about to explore Ballarat, much as in London might a South Kensington coterie at hearing that a cherished classmate thought it necessary thus to satisfy her doubts about the Patagonians or the Modoc Indians, always ending their politest commiseration with an invitation.

Finally, all entreaties proving unavailing, Estelle was driven in before sunrise, and at 6 A.M. found herself on the box-seat of the Ballarat coach, specially commended to the care of Mr. Levi, the driver, who was waiting for the clock of the Melbourne post-office to strike, preparatory to the customary sensational start of Cobb and Co.'s team of well-groomed, high-conditioned grays.

CHAPTER XVIII

Much to Estelle's surprise, the journey, strange and unfamiliar as were all things to the English maiden of a country family, was far from unpleasant. The rapid rate of travelling, the speed and stoutness of the horses, the astonishing dexterity of the American stage-driver, were alike novel and interesting; and these were matters as to which she was qualified to judge. Like many English girls brought up in a great country-house, she rode well and fearlessly —had, indeed, for more than one season, ere the shadow fell upon Wychwood, followed the hounds with decided credit. Beginning with a pony carriage, she had in later years amused herself with driving her uncle in a pair-horse phaeton, with a groom in the back seat of

course. She was therefore intelligently interested in the ease and accuracy with which the laconic Mr. Levi piloted his team alike adown crooked stump-guarded sidelings, through dense primeval forests, and over unbridged creeks, for under such perilous conditions the road to Ballarat in the early 'fifties' pursued its devious course. The driver, in whose charge she had been placed, with strong recommendations and a liberal *douceur*, by Mr. Vernon, though saturnine and sparing of speech, as was customary with that 'spoiled child of fortune,' the stage-driver of the period, was, in his way, courteous and respectful. He indicated from time to time points of interest in the landscape. He even answered her questions civilly and with a show of attention. Concerning the coach and harness, the leather springs and the formidable brake, so diverse from all English experience, he was explanatory and gracious. The day was fine, the air clear and fresh, while from the close-ranked eucalyptus exuded

balsamic odours, which, to her aroused fancy and eager appreciation of the new nature which encircled her, savoured of strange health-giving powers. The flitting birds, the occasional forest cries, the great flocks of sheep, the absence of enclosures, the droves of cattle and horses with their equally wild-looking attendants, the long trains of bullock-drays and waggons — were not these the wonders and portents of the land of gold? In despite of forebodings and the sense of isolation with which Estelle Chaloner had commenced this most eventful enterprise of her life, the natural fearlessness of her race asserted itself, and, true to the instincts of youth, her spirits rose perceptibly. When at the close of the day the coach rattled along the macadamised road which prepared the passengers for the lighted streets, the clanking engines, and yawning shafts of Ballarat, she had confessed to herself that Australia was by no means so dreadful a place as she had expected.

The team was now pulled up nervously close to the doorstep of a large well-lighted hotel, thus at once exhibiting the proverbial skill of Mr. Levi, and scattering the group of loungers which surrounded the entrance. Then a man's voice hailed the driver cheerfully, and demanded of him whether Miss Chaloner from Melbourne was on the coach.

'Right you are, Commissioner,' was the response. 'If you'll help the young lady down, reckon I've delivered her into the protection of Her Majesty's Government. Her luggage is in the rack. Joe'll have it near out by this. Good-night, Miss. The Commissioner'll take care of you.'

'Good-night, and thank you very much,' said Estelle, as, stepping downwards cautiously from the high box-seat, she found herself almost in the arms of a tall man, who half-assisted, half-lifted her down.

'Permit me to introduce myself, Miss Chaloner,' he said, 'as Mr. Dalton and Her Majesty's Commissioner of this goldfield. I

had a note from a friend and brother officer in Melbourne advising me of your coming. I have arranged with Mrs. M'Alpine, the wife of the Police Magistrate, who will be most happy to receive you. You will find her cottage more comfortable than an hotel. Trust yourself to my escort and we shall be there in a few minutes.'

'This is some of Mrs. Vernon's kindness, I am sure,' said Estelle. 'Really I seem to have friends everywhere in this land of strangers.'

'May you always find it so, Miss Chaloner. Please to honour me by enrolling me among the number. This is our vehicle, and your luggage is safely packed.'

A nondescript trap with four high wheels and disproportionately large lamps stood near. Into this her companion helped her, and taking the reins dashed away into the darkness, as it seemed to Estelle, at a reckless and extravagant pace. After threading several side streets, however, and ascending a slight

elevation without loss or damage, Mr. Dalton drew up beside a garden gate, out of which issued a lady, who, taking both her hands in hers, welcomed her guest with effusive warmth.

'So glad to see you, my dear Miss Chaloner. Mrs. Vernon was afraid you would get lost in our dreadful goldfield. We trust you will find us not *quite* such barbarians as the Melbourne people think us. Mr. Dalton, you'll stay and have tea? No? Don't say you've got business; I know what *that* means—loo or poker at that wicked camp. Perhaps you'll look in to-morrow evening? You may? That's very good of you. We'll manage a whist party and a chat, at any rate. Good-night. Now, my dear, we'll have a "small and early" all to ourselves. It's just as well Dalton didn't come in. He suspected you were tired, I daresay.'

After a few more disjointed, but all hospitable and sympathetic utterances, Mrs. M'Alpine inducted Estelle into an extremely

neat and comfortable bedroom, and bidding her not to trouble herself to make any change in her attire, for tea was quite ready, left her to consider the situation.

No sooner had this kindly acquaintance left the room than the strangeness of the situation appeared to force itself upon Estelle. She looked out through the open window — a hinged casement overhung with a trailing creeper, the glossy leaves of which partly obscured, partly diverted into glittering fragments of rays, the gleaming moonlight. It was a still evening. The half-audible murmur of a large population, confused and inarticulate, came faintly on her ear. There was a softness in the air which soothed her somewhat excited brain. Thinking over the strangely-varied experience of the past week, she could not help owning to herself that so far everything had been rendered easy through the kindness of these newly-found friends in a far land.

'Who knows,' she asked herself, 'whether

I may not find similar aid and guidance throughout my quest? May Heaven grant it! My errand is one of sacred necessity, pledged as I am to this by my vow to the memory of the dead. As God shall help me, I will remain faithful to the end. I begin to feel that though far from dear England's shores I am still surrounded by English hearts and English homes—changed in form, and in form alone, as the latter may be. "Onward" must be my motto.'

Thus concluding her meditations, Estelle bathed her eyes, somewhat sensitised after the day's exposure, and then making some slight but befitting change in her attire, joined her hostess in the pleasant sitting-room, now devoted to the exigencies of the evening meal. Over the tea-table, and within the influence of a cheerful wood fire, the younger woman became insensibly more unreserved and confiding as to her place and purpose. Mr. M'Alpine had not returned to his home, presumably detained by business of importance.

It may be surmised that neither of the ladies was deeply grieved at his absence, under the circumstances.

Being in full possession of facts, as far as Estelle had resolved to furnish them to Australian friends, Mrs. M'Alpine strongly recommended her guest to remain with her for the present, and await the coming of Mr. Stirling, who would be certain to arrive on the morrow or the day after, on being notified of her presence in Ballarat. 'Our town looks uncivilised, my dear, but Growlers' Gully (fancy such a name) is, of course, only a rude caricature of it. I don't think you could possibly exist there, though there is an hotel of some sort.'

Very gently and quietly, but firmly, Estelle made it apparent to her hostess that she was not to be shaken in her purpose. She had formed her plans carefully before leaving Melbourne, indeed during the voyage, and she had determined to see with her own eyes the very claim, as they called it, where he, the

loved, the lost Lance Trevanion had worked. She must see John Polwarth, with whose name she was familiar, and his honest-hearted wife. She would never be able to rest without full and complete explanation from Mr. Stirling of all things connected with Lance's mysterious disappearance. Of course she could imagine that in Australia people often moved away to new diggings at great distances, and, she supposed, left off writing to their friends, though she could hardly account for it in her cousin's case. 'Poor thing! poor thing!' said Mrs. M'Alpine to herself, 'she will have to hear the wretched truth some time or other. *I* can't venture upon it, but I don't know a man who is more likely to break it to her gently than Charlie Stirling, and so, as she is bent upon it, the sooner she gets safely out to "Growlers'" the better.'

So it came to pass that, as Mr. M'Alpine was still absent on outpost duty, a trusty messenger was despatched next day for the Commissioner, who regretfully saw Estelle

safely into the coach which, leaving daily for Growlers' at the convenient hour of 10 A.M., was the recognised mode of communication with that rising goldfield and township.

There were two horses instead of four. The coach was smaller, and by no means so well appointed. The driver was less distinguished in air and manner, but capable and civil, particularly after receiving the Commissioner's strict injunction to take great care of his lady passenger. The road was more than novel, indeed exciting, to Estelle's untravelled mind, winding amid fallen trees, bounded on either side by yawning dark-mouthed shafts of unknown depth — some desolate and deserted, with unused windlass and dangling rope; others in work, with full-laden buckets which, as they came to the surface, Estelle believed to be partly filled with gold—now crossing a rushing water-race upon a rustic bridge of most temporary nature, and finally plunging through a creek which flowed level with the feet of the inside

passengers. On the farther bank of this much celebrated watercourse stood a scattered collection of huts, tents, and cottages, threading which by no particular roadway the coach dashed ostentatiously into a more closely occupied thoroughfare, in which some dozen edifices of superior pretensions denoted the business centre of the township.

Here the minor peculiarities of a goldfield, somewhat shaded off in the civilisation of Ballarat, commenced to present themselves. The 'Reefers' Arms' was an enlarged cottage, the front of which boasted the more expensive and, in goldfields architecture, more correct material of 'sawn stuff,' disposed weatherboard fashion, while the side walls, the roof, and rear of the building were composed of large sheets of stringy bark. It was wholly unlike any building which Estelle had ever imagined—certainly with a view to lodging therein. However, this was not the time to falter or hesitate; she had chosen her course and must follow it out.

Carrying her smaller property in each hand, and following the driver, who walked through a group of loiterers or still unsated revellers who encumbered the entrance, Estelle found herself in a painfully clean sitting-room, in which her guide deposited her portmanteau, merely saying, 'I'll call Mrs. Delf to see you, Miss,' and departed.

He had probably explained that the young lady was a friend of the Police Magistrate and the Commissioner. Nothing further was necessary to ensure her the utmost respect and attention which Growlers' could afford. Both functionaries were men in authority, and as such to be held in awe. Though it is probable that even without these valuable introductions any girl, though wholly unprotected, who was conventionally correct of conduct would have met with similar attention. As to the peculiarity of a young lady, apparently of position, electing to abide temporarily in such a queer locality as Growlers', the hostess was not likely to disquiet her-

self. So many strange things and strange people were constantly in the habit of passing across the orbit of any given goldfield that surprise was of all the emotions the most rare and difficult to arouse.

Mrs. Delf shortly presented herself: a neat, alert personage, shrewd of aspect and decisive of speech. She anticipated any inquiry of Estelle by remarking, 'Ned tells me, Miss Chaloner, as you want to stop here for a while. Well, you know Growlers' always was a rough shop, and I can't say as it's altogether A1 now, but I'll do what I can for you while you're here, Miss.'

'Thank you very much,' said Estelle. 'I may stay a few days, or even longer. Would you kindly tell me if you remember a Mr. Trevanion who was mining here more than a year ago?'

'Trevanion—Lance Trevanion? Of course I do. Belonged to Number Six. He and Jack Polwarth were mates—and a stunning claim it is this very day. Know him? Why,

he stayed here the very last night he was on the field—poor fellow!'

'Then he has gone away—left this part of the country?' asked Estelle, with such anxiety depicted on her countenance that the quick-witted matron at once divined that the real truth was as yet unknown to her. 'And why do you say "poor fellow"? Has anything happened to him?'

'Oh no! Not at all, Miss—that is, not that I've heard of' ('and that's a banger, if ever there was one,' ejaculated the good woman inwardly); 'it's a manner of speaking, that's all—we were all fond of him, and sorry to lose him, you see. Is there any one else here you know, Miss? Oh! Mr. Stirling of the Bank opposite will be here to dinner at one o'clock; has his meals here regular, though of course he sleeps at the Bank. He'll tell you all about Mr. Trevanion. Bless you, they was like brothers. As for Mr. Stirling, he's that quiet — why, whatever's up at the Bank? Not a fight, surely?'

This exclamatory query was apparently caused by a simultaneous rush of all the unoccupied portion of the population, with the exception of three men who stood up in a cart, across to the comparatively pretentious building with corrugated iron roof, legended on the front as the Joint-Stock Bank of Australia. Mrs. Delf's experienced eye had noted the formation of a ring, simultaneously with the sudden precipitation on his head of an able-bodied miner through the Bank's portal.

'It's that "Geordie" Billy, sure as I live; he's been cheekin' Mr. Stirling about his gold and got chucked out. He's a rough chap when he's had a drop. There's bound to be a row now.'

A tall brown-bearded man, decidedly in undress uniform, but effectively attired for service, had by this time appeared at the door. He wore a coloured crimean shirt, to which, however, was attached a white linen collar. His coat was off, and his sleeves

had been rolled up. He watched with a smile the burly miner recover himself, and standing upright glare around him with the silent fury of the bull-dog in his small black eye.

'Are ye game to come out of your box there and stand up to a *man*?' he growled out. 'I'll show ye what it is to put your hands on me!'

The banker's answer to the challenge was to walk calmly forward, while the spectators, with cheerful expectancy, closed around, in confident trust that one of the principal excitements of their monotonous existence would not fail them.

'I'd rather see you go home, Billy, and sleep off your sulk. It's the grog that always makes a fool of you; but if you must have a licking, come on.'

'Oh dear me!' cried Estelle, who, with the most liberal allowance for the free and lawless life which colonists are believed to lead, had scarcely expected this. 'Are they really going

to fight? How dreadful! That gentleman may be killed.'

'Not he, Miss. Mr. Stirling's a hard man to mark; not but what the "Geordie's" as strong as a bull, and can fight too. Come to this window, Miss; we can see it first-rate from here. They'll only have two or three rounds, and his mates'll take away Billy.'

'And is *that* Mr. Stirling?' asked Estelle, with deepest amazement. 'I thought you said he was so quiet?'

'So he is, Miss, till he's put upon. I expect Geordie said he was weighing the gold wrong, and Mr. Stirling won't likely stand that from a digger, and put him out. That's about the size of it. Oh, do look, Miss; they're going at it.'

Estelle was much minded to turn her head away. In her own country she would doubtless have thought shame to have looked on at any such spectacle. But somehow the anxiety to see how the aristocrat fared in conflict with the man of the people overpowered her scruples,

so she gazed eagerly at the conflict, as might her ancestress at a tournament where her badge was worn by a knightly aspirant.

'Geordie' Billy, belonging to a section of miners who hailed from 'canny Newcassel,' was a low-set, broad-chested, unusually powerful man. Long in the reach, and in the pink of condition from severe daily labour, his enormous strength and dogged courage, independently of science, made him a dangerous antagonist. Mr. Stirling was held to be the most finished performer with the gloves on the field. It was therefore a contest of champions, and as such awaited by the crowd with keen and pleasurable expectation; and a very ugly customer indeed did Mr. Billy Corve appear, as he came forward with an activity which the various 'nips' he had indulged in that morning had but slightly impaired. Had one of those sledge-hammer blows which he delivered with fierce rapidity taken effect, Mr. Stirling would have had some difficulty in 'coming to time.'

But stepping back from one, eluding another by what appeared to be the slightest side movement of his head, and stopping a third neatly, he caught his advancing foe such a left-handed facer as staggered him, leaving him a prey to the body blow that followed, and which, getting 'home' to some purpose, sent him very decidedly to grass.

'Oh dear, how dreadful!' said Estelle, pale with apprehension. 'Surely they won't let them kill one another? That poor man must be badly hurt.'

'Not a bit of it, Miss. You couldn't kill Billy with an axe. He'll be all the steadier for it next round. Oh! look out, Mr. Stirling.'

This friendly admonition, which in the ardour of her partisanship Mrs. Delf screamed out at the top of her voice, was justified by the apparent success of the very ugly rush which Mr. Corve made, with the evident intention of getting to close quarters. He broke through Stirling's guard, and nearly

succeeded in getting his head 'into chancery,' as that peculiar feat of the combat is designated. Once enfolded with that mighty arm, and the enormous fist left free to pound away at discretion, the classical outline of Charlie Stirling's features would have been sadly marred, perhaps permanently altered. But *dîs aliter visum.* Countering with lightning quickness through the 'half-arm rally,' Stirling managed, by the exercise of desperate agility, to keep clear of the octopus-like hug, in which science would have been vain. Finally, springing backward, he evaded a final lunge, and darting in from the side administered a rattling hit on the 'point,' which for the moment completely discomfited his antagonist.

A ringing cheer went up from the discriminating crowd, while a friendly bystander, moved to apprehensive sympathy, earnestly exclaimed, 'Keep your head, Mr. Stirling; for God's sake, sir, keep your head.'

But Charlie Stirling had already seen the necessity for caution, for though his gray eyes

glowed and his chest heaved as he regained his corner, he seemed to fall mechanically into the attitude of calm watchfulness with which he had commenced the encounter.

'Wasn't that grand, Miss?' exclaimed Mrs. Delt. 'Mr. Stirling's as quick on his pins as a wallaroo. I was most afeard the "Geordie" had him then. This round will settle it. Don't go in, Miss. Maybe you'll never have a chance to see a right-out good mill so comfortable again. Two to one on Mr. Stirling.'

For her life Estelle could not have moved away then, though she had turned her head a minute before, deeming that for shame's sake she could no longer look on at such a sight. But the ancient fire which glowed in the breasts of the patrician dames of Rome's proudest day, though stifled and repressed for centuries, has never quite died out of the female heart. After all, no one would be killed, or perhaps mortally wounded. Mr. Stirling was Lance's friend, thus necessarily

hers. She could not bear to leave the arena ignorant of the fate of their champion.

She had not long to wait. And now that her blood was slightly warmed by the excitement of a real battle, a combat not quite *à l'outrance*, but as near to it as is permitted in these degenerate days, she confessed to herself that there was something not wholly inglorious in this ordeal by combat.

The tall athletic form of Charlie Stirling showed to great advantage as he advanced, with head erect and elastic step, towards his truculent antagonist, whose countenance, with a splash of blood from brow to bare neck, wore a savagely stern expression. Furious at his late failure, he made a rush, with every intention of ending the fight then and there. Forcing the fighting, and compelling Stirling to use his utmost skill in warding off or evading his terrific blows, each one of which was sufficient to disable an ordinary man, he appeared at one time to have mastered his adversary. But Charlie Stirling, the hero of

a hundred glove-fights, was too clever, in the language of the *lanista*. Feinting suddenly, he drew the blow, of which he had thoroughly mastered an infallible guard, at the same time getting home with his right in a terrific body blow, the effect of which brought his man forward, to be shot backward by a lightning left-hander on the temple, which stretched the brawny gladiator senseless, putting the possibility of 'coming to time' entirely out of the question.

'Great work, Mr. Stirling! You gave him "London" that time,' shouted a man who hailed from Bow Bells; and amid congratulatory cheers, in which Estelle felt a sudden impulse to join, the discomfited champion, after recovering his valuable intellects, was led off—resisting manfully, to do him justice. But his crowd was decidedly against him, and by force of numbers, in despite of oaths and protestations, he was borne off to a rival hostelry, there to drown his mortification in beer, and finish the day in a

manner worthy of its auspicious commencement.

As for Mr. Stirling, he 'retired into his kingdom' (like the king in Hans Andersen), 'and shut the door after him'—presumably for ablution, for he emerged in half an hour, at the sound of Mrs. Delf's dinner-bell, arrayed in conventional garments, and, save a slightly flushed countenance and a forehead bruise, unscathed from his recent encounter.

Meanwhile Estelle proceeded to Mrs. Delf's dining-room—not without natural misgivings as to the composition of the *table d'hôte*. These, however, were set at rest by observing that only six guests were provided for. They proved to be Mr. Stirling and the manager of another bank, a commercial traveller, a gold-buyer, and a stranger unclassified, all of whom were scrupulously correct and deferential of manner. Later on she became aware that, according to the highly commendable custom of Australian hotels, even on the most recent goldfields and out-of-the-way country towns,

there are two tables, corresponding to first and second class in railways. At the first those who may be considered gentle-folk are entertained, while to the second the rougher and less manageable guests are relegated.

'Miss Chaloner,' said Mr. Stirling, bowing deferentially upon entering, 'perhaps you will permit me to introduce myself, while expressing my deep regret that you should have been an involuntary spectator of such a disgraceful occurrence. We are not generally so badly behaved, though you are the only lady that has so far honoured Growlers' with a visit. We have no police to keep order, so we are obliged to protect ourselves.'

Estelle faintly smiled as she replied, 'You seem to be able to do so pretty well, if I may judge from appearances. I hope no one is severely hurt. Ought I to congratulate you on your victory?'

'You don't know how relieved I feel at your forgiveness, Miss Chaloner,' he replied. 'As for Geordie (who really is a deserving

individual when sober, and a capitalist besides), he is wholly unhurt, and to-morrow you will probably see him on the most friendly terms with me and all mankind.'

Before returning to business, Stirling found means to intimate to Estelle that he was aware from Mrs. M'Alpine's letter that she wished to have some private conversation with him; that he would do himself the honour of calling upon her later in the afternoon, when he would be most happy to afford her whatever information he was possessed of about her cousin.

'Thank you very much,' she said. 'Oh, Mr. Stirling, if you knew how I have longed to find some one who could give me authentic news of his movements. And you knew him so well?'

'Yes; *very* well. I must go now, but you shall hear all that I can tell you.'

Easier said than done, thought he, as once more in the small inner room of his unostentatious edifice he lit his pipe and abandoned

himself to fullest contemplation. 'And what in the world shall I tell her? What a glorious girl she is. What an air of refinement, and yet with what courage and high resolve she has faced the difficulties of her position. Proud, cultured, aristocratic to the finger-tips, she has volunteered to expose herself to rough journeyings, rude associates—even ruder in her imagining than the reality. And for what? For the sake of a heedless, self-indulgent scamp like Lance Trevanion, who never was good enough to black her boots. God knows, I pity him from the very bottom of my heart; but I cannot help believing that it was his own selfish obstinacy in a great measure that brought about his ruin. And now I have to tell this sweet and noble creature that her lover was till lately a convicted felon—actually at present an escaped prisoner, at the mercy of the first police trooper that falls across him. The bare idea is frightful.' And then Mr. Charles Stirling filled his pipe again to the brim and smoked

on for some considerable time, apparently in a most anxious, not to say despondent, frame of mind. The irruption of a party of diggers with a parcel of gold to be weighed and deposited here temporarily diverted his thoughts, but soon after four o'clock, having finished his day's work and impressed upon his junior to keep close to the bank premises in his absence, he betook himself to Mrs. Delf's hostelry. He found Estelle awaiting him in walking attire. He proposed that they should visit Number Six claim, where Jack Polwarth still lived and worked. It was barely a mile distant. On the way he would be able to give her all the information she desired.

'Nothing would please her more. She was fond of walking, and should like above all things to see a real claim at work.' So forth they fared through the crooked, straggling street, crowded on either side with the heterogeneous buildings of a goldfield town. Turning to the south, they trod a winding track through a labyrinth of shafts of all sizes and

depths of sinking. Mounds of earth thrown up in every direction gave the scene a ghastly resemblance to the cemetery of a plague-stricken city. As if unwilling to enter upon the subject so unavoidably painful, Stirling directed her attention to the various novel features of the scene. When, suddenly turning towards him, she said in a low but distinct tone of voice: 'And now, Mr. Stirling, please to tell me all you know of my unfortunate cousin. No one has said so in so many words, but I *feel* it'—here she laid her hand upon her heart—'something dreadful has happened to him. Is it not so?'

'I wish I could deny it,' he answered, in a tone of the deepest feeling; 'but I cannot. Your heart has warned you truly. He is a most unfortunate man.'

'He has left the locality altogether then, and permanently?' she asked.

'Yes.'

'Tell me all,'—here she clasped her hands and looked so imploringly in his face that

Charlie Stirling, seeing but the misery in her pleading face, felt minded to kneel down and kiss the hem of her garment. 'Oh that those eyes could so soften and glow for me,' he thought. 'And all this heavenly love and tenderness wasted. Alas!'

But he said only, 'My dear Miss Chaloner, my heart bleeds for you; you must prepare to hear the worst.'

'*Is he dead?*' said she hoarsely, in a changed voice.

'No, not *dead*. Better perhaps that he had been. Were he my brother, I should say the same.'

'Thank God for that,' she said. 'If he is alive I may look upon his face again. Tell me—tell me at once——' and here, oh marvellous and divine power of woman's love! her face lit up with a glow of gratitude and hope, which to her admiring companion's mind changed it into the presentment of a saint.

He motioned her to sit down upon one of the fallen forest trees which thickly, in places,

encumbered the earth, and there told her as briefly as might be the whole miserable tale. He made but scant mention of the Lawless sisters, laying great stress upon the iniquitous nature of the trap into which Lance had fallen —the persistent hostility of Dayrell and his settled intention to secure a conviction.

'I see it all,' she said, rising from her seat and walking excitedly onward. 'I see it all. He has been the victim of a conspiracy among these wretches—poor poor Lance! Why did he insist upon coming to this unhappy land? But is he alive—alive? Justice will yet be done. I will see him if he is above ground in Australia, and together we must work, with the aid of his friends, for an honourable release. Oh! I cannot tell you how relieved I feel,' continued Estelle. 'I am glad; I thought that he was dead. It has given me strength to bear the dreadful thought of his imprisonment. And now tell me about it, tell me while I am strong.'

Stirling saw his opportunity. It was a

hard, a most painful task; but now he would go through with it. He scarce hoped that she would have made it so easy for him. This ground had now become more open, and on the bank of the ravine, widening into a green and level meadow, he saw the windlass and shaft of Number Six, above which floated a red flag, the well-known signal, brought here by Californian miners, that the claim was 'on gold.' They had still some distance to go; her feet, that were so fleet and eager a while since, became slow and listless. Ere they reached the mound on the other side of which they saw the stalwart form and good-humoured countenance of John Polwarth, he had told and she had heard the sad finale to the high hopes and joyous aspirations of Lance Trevanion.

'And now that he has escaped from these terrible hulks, I suppose there is not much chance of his being recaptured? This country is so wild and large that surely prisoners must nearly always escape?'

'No doubt they do, but not so often as we might think. The country is wild, but those who pursue them are keen and fearless. However, the place that he has reached is inaccessible and distant.'

'Thank God for that,' she said softly. 'Perhaps he can travel safely through the wilderness and find a ship for England. Oh, if he were but once at home!—at home! Why did he ever leave? But I must not break down now. Is that John Polwarth?'

'Yes, and yonder is Mrs. Polwarth at the door of that neat cottage, and Tottie standing by her. I think we may as well call upon her first, and have Jack in by and by. She is a good, kindly woman, and Lance's misfortune was a bitter grief to her.'

'He seems to have had such *good* friends around him,' said Estelle sorrowfully; 'why could they not save him? But I know that he was wilful and headstrong. Alas! alas!'

By this time they had reached Mrs. Polwarth's cottage—a mansion in the estimation

of all 'Growlers',' inasmuch as it boasted of four rooms of medium size, a verandah, and a detached slab kitchen. Mrs. Polwarth, who was engaged in sweeping around her door,—a space in front of all miners' habitations being scrupulously kept clear of sticks, leaves, and other untidinesses,—halted in her occupation and greeted Mr. Stirling warmly.

'Why, whatever's brought you over to-day, Mr. Stirling? I suppose this fine afternoon? Come inside and I'll get you a cup of tea after your walk. Maybe the lady's a little tired.'

'We shall be glad of the chance, I am sure. Mrs. Polwarth, this lady is Miss Chaloner, a cousin of Lance Trevanion, our poor friend and Jack's partner. She has come all the way from England, from his old home, to see about him.'

'The Lord bless and keep us!' said Mrs. Polwarth—a devout Wesleyan, as are mostly Cornish mining folk. 'Only to think of that! It's the doing of Providence, that's what it is. Sit ye down, Miss. To think I should ever

see you in my poor place. It's clean and neat what there is of it, too. And to think of your being *his* cousin—poor Mr. Lance's cousin. Many's the tear I shed thinking o'er his sad fate. Oh dear! oh dear! I'm that glad to see this day.'

'And I am very glad to see you, Mrs. Polwarth,' said the English girl, softening at once at the sight of the genuine grief displayed by the good woman, for the tears were by this time running down her cheeks. 'I have so often heard of you in my cousin's letters that I seem to know you quite well. And is this Tottie? Come to me, my dear, and tell me how old you are.'

Tottie, a pretty child, rather more carefully attired than usual, was not shy, and coming up to the pretty lady, as she ever afterwards described her, looked up wonderingly, with great blue eyes and a wistful smile.

'Mother, is this Lance's sister?' she said, with the curious childish intuition which seems to suggest so many guesses at truth

—some near enough in all conscience. 'Is he coming back to Tottie?'

Mr. Stirling 'thought he would go and have a word with Jack,' and, not sorry to leave the two women to open their hearts to each other, hastily departed.

There was no particular news about Number Six. 'She was going on steady,' Jack said. 'Last week was as good as any washing-up they'd had for a month, and she wasn't half worked out yet. So that was Mr. Lance's cousin, her as had coomed with Mr. Stirling? All the way from England, too? It was her as used to write to him and tell him about the old place at home, and how his father, the squire, was. And now the squire was dead. And Lance, poor chap, had broke gaol, and was gone nobody knew where. And this young lady was here all the way to Growlers'! It beats all. Wait till I run out this bucket and tidy myself a bit, Mr. Stirling, and I'll come over and see the young lady. It's a sight for sore eyes to see any one from the

old country; no offence to you, sir, as never was there, more's the pity. But it'll do Gwenny and me to talk about for a year to come, I'll warrant.'

Thus discoursing, they walked over to the cottage, where Stirling partook of the proffered cup of tea, and Polwarth, betaking himself to a back apartment, performed ablutions which caused his honest face to shine again, and, attired in his Sunday suit, presented himself after a while to Miss Chaloner. This young lady shook him warmly by the hand, and telling him that she had heard about him in every letter which Lance had written until — until — lately, expressed her sincere pleasure at seeing him and his wife.

'You were Lance's true friend, he always said. And many a time the poor squire and I felt so happy that he had an honest English heart and a stout English arm to rely upon in this far country.'

'Ah, Miss! Me and the wife had that feeling for him as we'd ha' done anything i'

the world to keep him from harm, but there was them as he took to, against our liking, that drawed him down the wrong way. It was a bad day as he ever seed 'em. I was always at him to cut loose and quit their company. But it was all no use ; he was that set and headstrong.'

'*We* knew that well, his poor father and I,' replied Estelle sadly ; 'that strange obstinacy of his, which runs in the family, they say, seems to have been his ruin. But I've come out here on purpose to find him, and if he lives in Australia I *will* find him before I leave.'

As Estelle pronounced the last words she raised her head proudly and gazed with a fixed and steady glance into the forest path, as if in her self-imposed task she could pierce their solitude and discover at whatever distance the object of her quest.

Her expressive countenance, even more than her words, carried conviction to her hearers of a high resolve. Stirling regarded

her with mingled feelings of respect and admiration, while Jack Polwarth, in rude but honest tones, broke out with, 'And so ye shall, Miss, and we'll help ye to the last drop of our blood; won't we, Mr. Stirling? Ye have the old courage and the old spirit in ye, Miss Chaloner; I could fancy I heard Mr. Lance himself speaking, poor chap.'

'I don't wish to pose as a heroine, Mr. Stirling,' she continued, blushing slightly at the momentary excitement into which she had been betrayed, 'but I wish all my friends to understand that I have fully resolved, for several reasons, not the least of which is that so I promised his father on his deathbed, to go through with this task, and, Heaven helping me, will never abandon it while Lance is alive.'

'I can quite appreciate your feeling in the matter, Miss Chaloner,' said Stirling. 'Nothing would give me more pleasure than to join you in the search for our unfortunate friend. But I am, so to speak, chained to

this spot. In all other ways you may command me, and I have good warrant for saying Jack Polwarth here, as well as Mr. Hastings, who is our staunch ally also, will join in the enterprise, heart and soul.'

'This is truly the land of warm and unselfish friendship,' replied Estelle. 'I have met with nothing else, for which I shall be grateful as long as I live. It will give me fresh confidence in my search. I never could have believed that the way would have been made so smooth for me. I feel more at home here than I have done since I left England. So I shall stay at Mrs. Delf's for a week longer, getting together all the information which I shall need.'

'I think we had better be moving, Miss Chaloner, or Mrs. Delf's gong will be sounding an alarm for tea. She has many virtues, but punctuality and scrubbing she may be said to carry to excess.'

'Amiable weaknesses, to my mind,' said Estelle, rising from her chair. 'I feel

disposed to humour them, and Mrs. Polwarth, if you will have me to-morrow, I will come down after breakfast, now that I know the way to Number Six, and spend the day with you and Tottie.'

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